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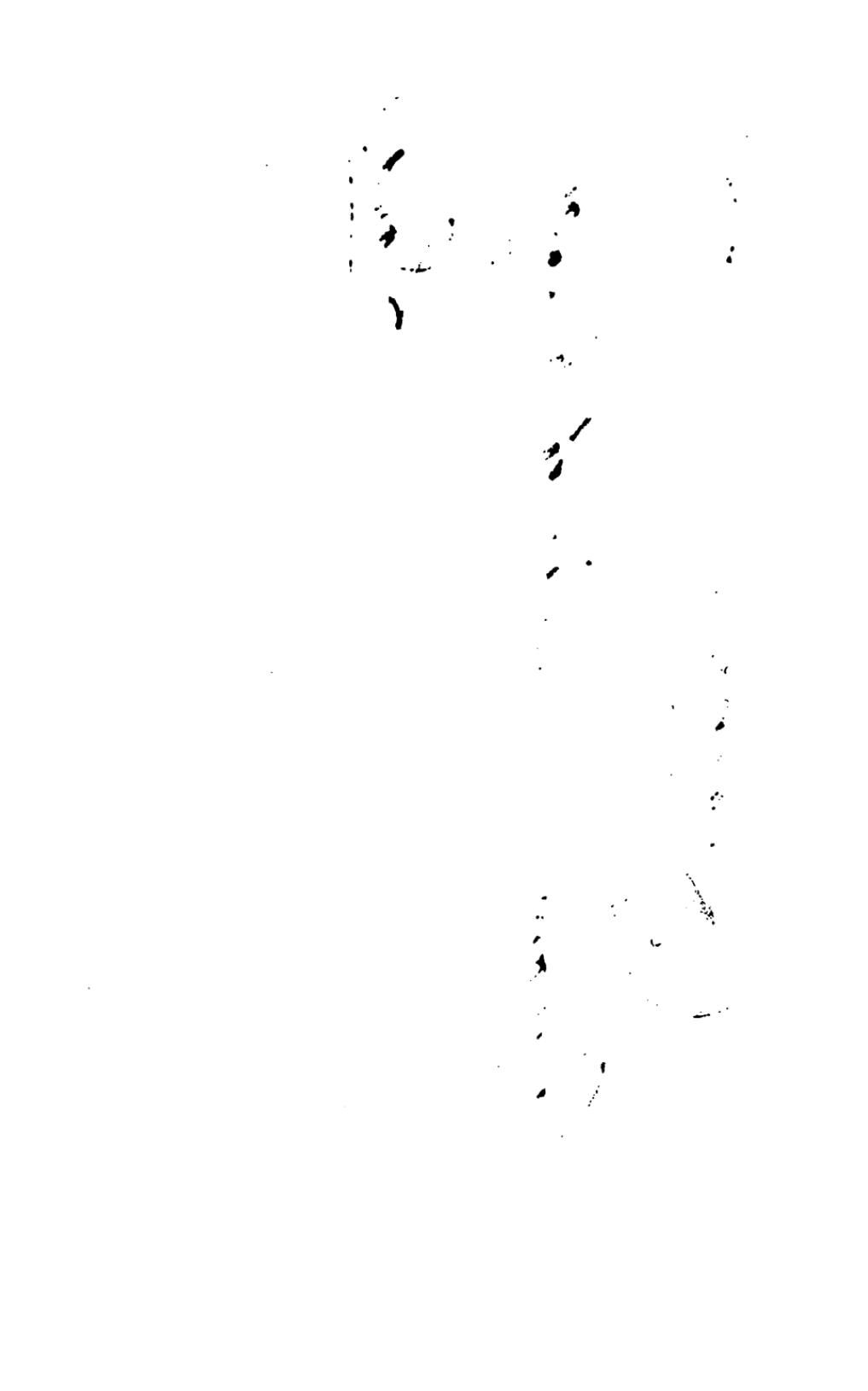
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A WOMAN
IN SPITE OF HERSELF



A WOMAN IN SPITE OF HERSELF.

VOL. I.



A WOMAN IN SPITE OF HERSELF.

BY

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AUTHOR OF

“LIVE IT DOWN,”

&c. &c.

IN THREE VOLUMES.

VOL. I.



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P A R T I.

IN SILK AND SERGE.

VOL. I.

B

A WOMAN IN SPITE OF HERSELF.

CHAPTER I.

“A TIME” AT QUEBEC.

THE rigour and severity of the Canadian winter are favourable to social festivity and domestic enjoyment in a degree that can scarcely be imagined by persons whose experience of winters in humid and fickle climates has not taught them that a frosty air may brace the nerves and exhilarate the spirits, instead of generating the miserable coldness which tries the fortitude of the hardy and utterly subdues the spirits of the weak. It is during the months of winter, when the snow flies like dust before the mad wind, and no sudden thaw is apprehended by enthusiastic skaters and sleigh-drivers, that

the English tourist should visit the principal cities of our most important American dependency, if he would make acquaintance with Canadian hospitality under the most favourable circumstances, and observe with what lightness of step and brightness of complexion and mad vivacity of speech and laughter the girls of Quebec and Montreal sustain the excitement and protract the pleasures of the ball-room.

But though the cold months are the period of the year which they specially devote to hospitable gladness, it is usual for the superior inhabitants of a Canadian town of any magnitude or social pretensions to have a summer season in which they amuse themselves very much after the fashion of our Mayfair idlers during the interval between the close of April and the later days of July. For a lady to be ambitious of shining in assemblies and winning the admiration of drawing-rooms, it is not necessary that she should reside in a European capital; and young people of both sexes are apt to have tastes and aims which require for their gratification or accomplishment the opportuni-

ties of social intercourse, though they may be denizens of a Transatlantic colony and lack the style and culture of Belgravian discipline.

It is therefore in accordance with the everlasting fitness of things, and for sufficient ends, that Quebec annually indulges in a brief burst of gaiety which is called her winter-season by all intelligent persons who have the good fortune to live within gunshot of Fort Diamond. Nor was it in any degree less fit and natural that some eleven years from the present time the people of Quebec made extraordinary exertions to impart to their summer-season the brilliance and diversity appropriate to metropolitan gaiety. Various memorable circumstances combined just then to put Quebec on good terms with herself, and inspire her with a laudable ambition to demonstrate to an extraordinary number of European and United States' strangers that, even as she surpassed all the other cities of British North America in antiquity and historic renown, so she excelled them in politeness and social grace. The temporary reappearance of the colonial parliament in the ancient seat of the

government of Canada would alone have incited the authorities and principal inhabitants of Quebec to make unusual exertions for the honour of their picturesque capital. But scarcely had the public sentiment of the city begun to exult over what it was pleased to regard as the restoration of a forfeited honour, when the elation and amiable insolence of the magistracy, populace, and other good people of St. Lawrence's grandest stronghold were raised yet higher by an announcement that, ere many weeks had passed, they would have the honour of entertaining and the delight of gazing upon the majestic youth who, in the course of years and propitious fortune, would be their sovereign.

Under these circumstances, it was not surprising that the Quebecians perpetrated decorations and festal excesses with lavish prodigality and a disregard of dollars' worth that caused the few cool heads of the excited community to predict the speedy advent of colonial bankruptcy. Upholsterers and house-painters were jubilant about the buoyancy and prospects of

trade. Solemn, mournful houses, standing conspicuously in St. Lewis Street, or lurking in shady corners of the five gates of the Upper Town, whose antiquated and thrifty inhabitants had for twenty years never squandered a cent on a flower-pot or a strip of white muslin for a fresh window-blind, suddenly put themselves into the hands of artful restorers, and smiled out upon an astonished world with an air of honest pride in the change wrought in their appearance by nurserymen and needlewomen and workers in colour. In Buade Street and St. Anne Street, shops were refronted and furnished with plate-glass windows of startling magnitude by tradesmen prudently desirous of keeping up with the pace and spirit of the time. Such was the demand for skilled gardeners in the rural suburbs, approachable by the St. Foy and the St. Lewis roads, that horticultural practitioners, dependent for subsistence on the casual exigencies of several employers, were in a position to demand three dollars for a day's labour. Lumbering old coaches, that had sustained the dignity of colo-

nial *noblesse* for more than half a century, were exchanged for modern *barouches* or light phaetons, sent up from New York, or over the Atlantic from Long Acre, London. Mansions, that had not known gaiety since the *Fils de la Liberté* first raised the standard of rebellion at Montreal, dispersed invitations to state-dinners, and prepared their drawing-rooms for grand routs ; and whilst the lacqueys of the capital blazed forth in new liveries, such an improvement was discernible in the horse stock of the Upper Town, and its more opulent suburbs, that Mr. Clofin Bohen, stud-groom to General the Earl of Wimbledon, commander of Her Majesty's forces stationed in the garrison of Quebec, repeatedly remarked, at his favourite club, and in the dialect of his native state of New York, that he would with the greatest possible alacrity and cheerfulness commence a course of everlasting torture if the little town was not fast becoming the horsiest place in America outside the United States.

Under ordinary circumstances, a careful and saving, not to say parsimonious people, holding

their surplus cash tightly, or spending it with a caution and stinginess betokening their lively sense of its value, the more affluent Quebecians suddenly vanquished their habits of thrift, and throwing away the strings of their money-bags, went in for a reckless extravagance that astonished no less than it delighted their fellow-citizens of inferior fortune. At length it seemed to the comparatively impecunious members of a not opulent community that their good time had arrived, and given birth to a beneficent social crisis which, transferring wealth from those who did not need it greatly to those who needed it much, effected the voluntary impoverishment of the rich, and the highly acceptable enrichment of the poor. Nor were they wrong. Their good time had come—a time that will be long remembered in Quebec as the summer-season of the Prince of Wales's year.

CHAPTER II.

IN THE ARCADE OF THE QUEBEC POST-OFFICE.

QUEBEC was still whirling round and plunging about in the vortex of dissipation into which she had taken a fearless though deliberate header, in honour of her restored parliament and future sovereign, when, one hot, sweltering afternoon, midway between the hour of luncheon and the time of dinner, an unattended lady, whose more than ordinary height and stately carriage would have given dignity to her appearance even if her dress had betokened poverty and lowliness of degree, turned her back on the Castle Gardens, where the principal inhabitants of the capital had gathered, or were fast assembling, to enjoy an open-air military concert. Having crossed the Place d'Armes on

the side of the old Château, she walked the short length of Fort Street, and turning to the right at the southern extremity of Buade Street, proceeded towards the Post-office with a business-like directness which indicated that her solitary promenade had its object in that public building.

Whilst the ease with which she moved along the public ways betokened that her education had lacked no proper instruction in the art of deportment, her rich and elegant, though not inordinately sumptuous attire, gave favourable testimony respecting her taste and the competency of her milliner. Her bonnet, a thing of lace and lightness, though the performance of Canadian *artiste*, would have beseemed a Parisian *belle* taking her daily drive in the "Bois;" and nothing in the way of an attractive but unobtrusive afternoon dress, for a gentlewoman of her style, could be imagined in better design and keeping than the robe of violet silk and the white lace shawl that accorded with her imposing air, whilst they withdrew from observation the defective points of a figure

which, though by no means devoid of harmonious proportion, was more remarkable for imposing tallness than symmetry, and on a critical examination was found to be deficient in those waves and curves of outline that contribute so largely to the grace and loveliness of the perfect feminine contour.

Nor were the subordinate articles and minute complements of her attire chargeable with being of inferior excellence or in less unexceptionable taste. Her toy parasol, trimmed with a profusion of the finest lace, had as yet surrendered none of its virgin delicacy under the discolouring influence of scorching suns, or from exposure to clouds of dust; and the kid glove, filmy as the finest silk, and smooth with a rich, creamy smoothness, covering the hand that clasped the ivory handle of the dainty sun-shade, would have endured comparison with the choicest products of its kind procurable in Bond Street or the Rue de Rivoli. It was the same with the smallest additaments of her toilet. The lustrous brooch of a dazzling stone and plain gold-work that secured the ends of

her collar of Spanish point, the tiny jewelled studs that fastened her wrist-bands of the same material, and the serpent-like chain by which a bijou watch was guarded from injury if it should chance to slip from its pocket, were all of a quality and workmanship which showed that, if their wearer was fortunate in possessing pecuniary means for the gratification of somewhat expensive tastes, she was scarcely less felicitous in having a refined judgment for her guidance in the selection of articles of adornment. In short, at a glance it was obvious that she was an *édition de luxe* of English womanhood; and yet she was only a colonial belle who, in respect of personal refinement and gentle tone, was no more than the equal of some two or three hundred other marriageable young women who might have been seen, a few nights since, at the grand ball with which the Governor-General had celebrated his reappearance at the Old Château.

But let it not be supposed that tallness of stature and taste in dress were Felicia Avalon's most notable characteristics, because in drawing

the reader's attention to a charming woman I have spoken first of those matters that, eleven years since, were the first to strike the critical observer on seeing her casually at a social gathering. There are women who depend for their effectiveness on dress, and there are women who impart picturesqueness to every dress which they wear. That Felicia Avalon belonged to the latter class of womankind we have the testimony of Madame Perronet, the dressmaker of Fabrique Street—*court-milliner*, as the gar- rulous and by no means extortionate *modiste* likes to be styled by her customers, two-thirds of whom are the descendants of gentlewomen who, in pre-Union days, used to buy their pro- digious trains and outrageous furbelows and preposterous turbans of Madame Perronet's mother, whilom famous in Quebec as a practi- tioner in millinery, under the name and style of Madame Dinant.

“Of my patronesses,” Madame Perronet used to observe to her familiar friends, with a fer- vor declaratory of her Gallic origin, and a liberal use of Canadian-French expletives, “some

are made to look like ladies by what I put on their backs, whilst just a few are the making of their dresses ; and of those few Miss Avalon is a bright specimen. I never have any difficulty with her. There's no colour that puts her out of bloom, and no cut that doesn't seem to bring out one of her good points. When short skirts came in she could show a pretty pair of feet without making you think of the old market dame whose petticoats were cut about her knees ; and when the day for long dresses followed, it was a treat to see a new silk trailing and rustling after Miss Avalon as she swept about my show-room. Not that she is perfect, my dear—no, no. *Ma foi*, what lady is, to the court-milliner who knows her business ? It's I who know how narrow and straight she is, just where she ought to bound out with curves. It's only I and her maid who know what she would look like if it wasn't for the whalebone and wadding which I *will* put into her dresses, in spite of all the grand nonsense she talks about the vanity and deceitfulness of women who disguise the shapes which nature has given them.

‘Fiddle-de-dee, Miss Avalon,’ I answer ; ‘ that’s mighty fine to preach in that way at me, whose duty it is to improve on nature. Disguise your shape, indeed ! It’s just because you have no shape *there*, and *here*, that I make you up with just a little padding. Instead of scolding me, be thankful that you don’t stand in greater need of improvement.’ She is never angry with me for that sort of fun, bless you ! Of affable ladies there are many kinds. There’s the condescending lady, whose affability seems to say, ‘Am not I a model Christian for talking in this familiar style with a dressmaker ?’ Then there’s the affable lady who, after gossiping and laughing with me as though I were her sister, takes me up short at parting with a hint that I am not to presume on a gentlewoman’s condescension. But Miss Avalon is of another sort. There’s no wrinkle of pride in her affability. She always makes you feel that she is pleased to see you, and that, instead of talking for the pleasure of hearing herself talk, she draws you out in all kinds of chat, for the mere pleasure as it seems of listening to you, as though you were her par-



ticular friend. But, for all her courteous ways, she knows her own mind, and is not to be put from it like some of the high and mighty ones who, after all their grand airs and despotic talk, finish up by ordering exactly what you mean them to order. What Miss Avalon means to have when she enters my show-room, that I have to send her when she has left it, however much I may try to put her off with something else. And it's strangely pretty and clever in the way of nice manners, how, after binding me down to obey her in every particular, she always finishes with pretending that her will is mine, and that her confidence in my taste is complete. 'There, there, that will do, Madame Perronet; I leave it all to your judgment, which all the world knows is faultless.' My faith and heart! of all the *belles* of the city, there's ne'er a one that's more fit to be Queen of Quebec than Miss Avalon!"

Having entered the modest portico of the Quebec Post-Office, and walked half the length of its narrow Arcade, the lady, whose urbanity had made so deep and favourable an impression on

known to herself, she had wished to perform without observation.

Fortunately for his immediate peace of mind, Major Joseph Curtain Tilbury, R.A., was no nice scrutinizer of the human countenance, and had so favourable an opinion of his ability to please the fair sex in general, and Felicia Avalon in particular, that, even if he had remarked that lady's transient air of dissatisfaction and repugnance, it would not have occurred to him to regard it as the result of his unexpected appearance, or as in any way referable to her regard for himself.

Nor can it be denied that Major Tilbury's confidence in his powers of pleasing and general self-complacency had such justificatory grounds as might be looked for in his stature, bodily shape, and military bearing. The owner of a broad chest that indicated proper muscular capacity and physical development, and of a stature that almost established his claim to rank amongst men six feet high, he possessed a figure which, though evincing certain suspicious signs of a tendency towards corpulence, retained

some vestiges of the elegance by which it had been distinguished ten years earlier. And whatever advantages he boasted in respect of bodily shape were duly sustained by the judgment and skill of a competent tailor. By his comrades of the Artillery, Joseph Curtain Tilbury was known as one of the smartest men in the service, and for this reputation he was in no small degree indebted to sartorial art, though he studiously avoided even the slightest appearance of foppishness, and exercised in all arrangements for his personal decoration the same consistent though unobtrusive economy that controlled every department of his pecuniary expenditure. Entries in the Army Lists of past years were on the side of the rumours which represented that he was not a day less than forty years of age; but when pressed by malicious banterers to make a full statement concerning the time which he had spent or misspent on the earth's surface, he had for the last three years stubbornly maintained that he had not completed his seventh lustre. In behalf of which assertion even his assailants were compelled to admit

that it was not discredited by the condition of his thick chestnut-brown hair, in which no single grey hair was discernible, or by the appearance of his face, which, though it had broadened under the influence of time and self-indulgence, and to a microscopic observer showed some of the treacherous marks of methodical dissipation, had not altogether lost the fineness of feature and mirthful smile which in former times had gained for Joe Tilbury the reputation of being the best-looking youngster of his period at Woolwich.

For the rest, so far as the gentleman's appearance is concerned, it is enough for the present to remark that his coiffure, of the severest military style, about the nape of the neck and in the parts above the ears, allowed his hair a little freedom of action and curling-length on the summit of his head; and that his closely-cut moustaches afforded no concealment to the excellently white, but by no means unduly conspicuous teeth, whose appearance heightened most agreeably the effect of the cordial and roguish smiles which continually brightened his

face during idle conversation. By-and-by, I may take occasion to draw attention to some of the less agreeable characteristics of Major Tilbury's aspect and style; but just now, when, for for the benefit of Miss Felicia Avalon and other ladies assembled or about to assemble in the Castle Gardens, he has done his utmost to appear to the best advantage, it would be uncivil and malignant to point out his defects and cover them with the magnifying glass of satire.

“You slipt it into the slit for the London letters,” replied Major Tilbury, who prudently forbore to add that, having on his return from the Lower Town unexpectedly seen her cross the avenue of Prescott Gate, he had watched her walkingslowly in the direction of the post-office, which building he had, by a rapid movement, succeedel in entering at the further opening of the arcade, in time to read clandestinely over her shouder the address of the letter which she had posted for London.

“A mest satisfactory explanation,” returned Felicia Avalon, smiling at her own folly in putting a question to which the answer was so

obvious, and recovering in an instant all her customary self-possession and cordiality of manner.

“Allow me,” continued the Major, bowing once again on the acceptance of his statement, “to apologise for coming upon you so suddenly. It was not my design to give you a disagreeable surprise.”

“Nor have you done so, Major Tilbury,” the lady answered, extending to the man of arms the right hand, to the excellence of whose glove testimony has already been offered. “Surprises are not necessarily painful. On the contrary, I am glad to see you, sooner than I expected, back again from Montreal, where I doubt not you have had an abundance of gaiety and diversion.”

“Lots of gaiety, but not so much diversion. In the morning, breakfast and cigar; between breakfast and lunch, idling on lawns, or playing billiards with some rather nicish girls, who could use their tongues better than their cues; in the afternoon, a canter in the country or a drive with new acquaintances; then a big din-

ner and a ball. That was the order of every day—pleasant, no doubt, and commendably hospitable, but monotonous."

"You can scarcely have found time for the interests of the service?"

"No fear of my neglecting duty. I made my inspections, wrote my reports, and did all that kind of thing, and yet found plenty of time for eating, drinking, billiards, and waltzing, and all the other kinds of dull enjoyment put at my command by the good people of the second city in the colony. But don't imagine, Miss Avalon, that I'm such a monster of ingratitude as to run Montreal down, after she has done her best to destroy my liver and figure for the rest of my life. It's a doosid smart, jolly place; and they are going the pace there as fast as we are here. The matrimonial market is buoyant, political controversies are suspended, and every one is living, without a single demoralizing thought, for pay-day. The girls of the city are going on tick to their milliners with a recklessness that will give their cousins of New York a reputation for comparative prudence and stinginess;

and each one of them has made up her mind to get a kiss from the Prince of Wales. Moreover, the dinners were capital. Montreal has good cooks and first-rate wine-cellars."

"Everything for the body, but no congenial entertainment for the mind?" suggested Felicia Avalon, a mischievous smile animating her fine countenance, whilst her voice—a very peculiar voice, and resembling her countenance in its singular union of feminine gentleness and masculine power—uttered these words in a tone of interrogation and saucy ridicule.

"Lord bless you, Miss Avalon!" the Major returned quickly, repelling with fervour what appeared to him to be a serious imputation on his honour, "don't imagine that I have any appetite for mental food. Intellectual aspirations are altogether out of my way. *I* haven't a mind; *I'm* an artilleryman. If a fellow brings a mind with him into Her Majesty's regiment, the service very soon relieves him of that superfluous piece of baggage. It's a point of honour with an artilleryman to leave his mind behind him at Woolwich, as soon as he has passed

his examination and got his commission, for the use of any successor who may enter the Academy without brains of his own."

"You are at needless pains, Major Tilbury," interposed Miss Avalon, who, though she had her private reasons for regarding her companion with the intensest dislike and contempt, could condescend to extract amusement from his vanity and flippant sauciness, "to defend yourself from an accusation which no one is ever likely to prefer against you seriously."

Though the soldier, more thin-skinned than Felicia Avalon imagined, secretly winced under the satiric thrust, he had the good sense to conceal his annoyance, and at the same time the simplicity to amuse his adversary by complimenting her on the dexterity with which she had planted the blow. "Doosidly well put in!" exclaimed the generous critic. "'Pon honour, no London girl in her third season could have done it more smartly. That's just the sort of play in which women excel all the world over; and—don't think I flatter you, Miss Avalon; I am plain Joe Tilbury, and flatter nobody—it's

my candid opinion that the Canadian girls and women are quicker at repartee than their sisters of any other country in the world; and, by Jove, so far as style and make-up go, I really don't see that they are much under the mark of the London women."

Making a miniature mock-courtesy, which was the more piquant because it was performed by so stately a personage, and giving a quick deprecatory wave with her toy parasol and the hand that held her scent-bottle, the lady acknowledged her admirer's compliment by saying, "We girls and women of Canada are truly fortunate to have won the approbation of so fine a judge as Major Tilbury. For my absent sisters, no less than myself, I beg leave, sir, to express our colonial gratitude for your leniency. I hope that we may never lose your good opinion."

Though it would have cut to the quick any man not liable to a charge of inordinate vanity and stupefying self-esteem, Major Tilbury would have received this speech as an utterance of appropriate homage to his knowledge of the

world and consummate discernment in all matters of taste, had not the demurely spoken words been followed by a look of inimitable drollery in the speaker's face, and a certain indescribable movement in the folds of her drapery, which rendered it obvious even to her victim that she was sorely tempted to burst out laughing in his face.

More discomfited by the lady's merriment than enlightened as to its precise cause, Major Tilbury conceived a suspicion that he had exposed himself to her disesteem by rating his intellectual capacities too meanly,—an error which he forthwith attempted to amend by assuring Miss Avalon that he was by no means such a fool as it had been his humour to represent himself.

“Point of fact,” the Major urged towards the close of this remarkable vindication of his natural abilities, “when I was a youngster I was for a time quite a studious dog,—used to read poetry and history and all kinds of philosophy. Stowed away somewhere in England, either at my cousin's place in Hertfordshire or else at Sir Charles Tilbury's place in town—

gad! I forget which—I have a lot of books into which I copied all the best things out of almost every work of mark in English literature; Gibbon, Dr. Johnson, Shakspeare, Blair, Pinnoch, and 'all the rest of them.'

"If you continue your revelations, I shall be afraid to talk freely with so profound and universal a student."

"And," the Major went on, pursuing his own course across the conversational country, without paying any attention to Felicia Avalon's interruptions, "far from despising mental diversions and studious occupations, I shouldn't object to taking to books again, if I had nothing better to do. Of course it's an ascertained fact that no man of the first mark in any big business ever was a reading man. Lord Palmerston has never read a book of any kind since he was five-and-twenty. The Duke of Wellington used to say that, whenever he found an unusually bad officer, he was always sure, on inquiring, to discover that the fellow had graduated at one of the universities. Marlborough spelt so badly that his despatches were abso-

lutely ludicrous, until they had been touched up by his secretary. Stephenson—the fellow who turns out to have invented railways, and almost everything else that some other man was supposed to have invented—was an untaught mechanic. But still books have their uses. Sometimes they enable a man to get comfortably and cheaply through a lot of time which, but for them, would hang doosid heavy on his hands; and knowing what literature has done for many a poor beggar out of luck, I really think that, if I were to be regularly broken down and knocked up, I should go in again for reading, like my old chum and messmate, Tom Boileau."

"Pray don't," entreated Miss Avalon; "if you re-educate yourself, you won't be nearly so amusing a companion as you are now."

"Not so sure of that. Tom is an uncommonly amusing fellow, and yet he reads, year in, year out, his book a day, and a good deal more in the way of articles. But then a taste for literature was hereditary with Tom, who has got it in the romantic form. Tom went to

grief in the Artillery ; would buy expensive horses on his own judgment, though he had no eye for an animal's points ; would play high, though he had married a woman without money, and had no private fortune to speak of ; would borrow money of the Jews on terms of their own fixing. So the poor boy burst up—had to leave the service, and for two or three years had an awful time of it, until an old aunt left him an annuity of £300 a year, paid quarterly, on which Tom and his wife and little girl went to live in the neighbourhood of Ramsgate. Small income that for a man who once upon a time kept six horses, and thought himself badly used if he did not get a good bottle of claret after dinner ! But he is quite happy, and gets on, I may say, swimmingly. The secret of it is just this : he took to reading, which is about the cheapest way of killing time that a man can go in for. An annual subscription of £3 keeps him happy the whole year through. He takes his three volumes of fiction every morning between breakfast and five o'clock, when he has a short walk, and calls at the Ramsgate library

for a fresh supply of literary fodder. Dines at home; after dinner talks to his wife about what he has read in the morning; tops up with a slight tale in a magazine, and so to bed. What would have become of him without his studious tastes, I can't imagine."

"We have travelled all the way from Montreal to Ramsgate," Major Tilbury's listener observed, for the purpose of recalling him to their common interests.

"Don't let us travel all the way back again, Miss Avalon. I have had enough of Montreal. It isn't a bad place, but I could not enjoy life there for this simple reason—I wanted to be *here*."

In making which confession Major Tilbury lowered his voice to a confidential tone, that was designed to aid his words in making Felicia understand how dreary and depressing he would find existence in any place where she was not.

"And *here*," returned Miss Avalon, burlesquing his air of secret confidence, whilst she played upon his words, "is precisely the place

where I cannot enjoy life for a moment longer."

"Why so? It is a very snug little corner."

"Rather too snug, and at the same time rather too public. The people who recognise us as they pass through the Arcade, are doubtless wondering what induces me to let you detain me here so long."

"Probably they don't know you. If they do, what matters? All the people who have a right to gossip about our doings are at the Gardens."

"Where we will join them."

"By all means, if you will let me accompany you."

"Even to so old a friend as Major Tilbury, ten minutes is a long interview in this public place."

"You should not reproach me with my misfortune. It is no fault of mine if we are not old friends."

"Aunt Messurier will wonder where I have been. Let us hasten to her."

Whereupon, it being evident that Miss Avalon could not be induced to protract an inter-

view which had already occasioned her some little embarrassment, Major Tilbury bowed assent to her wish, and availing himself of her implied permission, prepared to attend her to the Castle Gardens.

CHAPTER III.

IN WHICH MAJOR TILBURY IS ADMONISHED NOT TO
PRESHUME.

IF Miss Avalon hoped to retire from the Arcade without attracting the attention of the loafers and loiterers, who usually hung about the entrances and purlieus of the Post-Office towards the close of the day, the hope must have deserted her when, on reaching the top of the flight of steps by which the office is approached, she saw her old friend, Nora M'Carthy, sitting on the pavement at the bottom of the stairs, with a huge basket of cheap fruit on either side of her by no means fragile or elegant person.

How can I introduce Nora to my readers, so as to give them a vivid and complete conception of her physical and moral peculiarities

without being guilty of injustice to the most whimsical, honest, affectionate old creature that ever earned a precarious subsistence by selling fruit in the public ways of a considerable city ? What words can do justice to her broad, low forehead and tigerish jaw, to her big mouth and battered visage, without conveying erroneous notions respecting the temper and habits of a lady who never committed an excess in whisky, unless the honour of St. Patrick or respect due to her own natal day sanctioned, if it did not demand, the indiscretion, and who never raised brawny arm or clenched fist in offensive warfare, unless an insult offered to her native island had roused within her breast a consuming zeal for Erin's renown.

“ The tap o' the morning to you, my darlint ! ” exclaimed Nora, rising with creditable quickness to the groggy and badly covered feet, which had no easy time of it in the service of an owner whose vocation was peripatetic and whose weight exceeded sixteen stone. “ And may you sleep all the better on the pillow of innocince, and on the couch of swate rapose for

gladdening the eyes of a wretched ould 'ooman. All hail to you, Miss Avalon! Och, and 'tis a glorious sight the seeing of you! Your eyes are just two burning stars in a darksome firma-
ment, and the grand show of dark brown hair that covers your proud head is like the black cloud that nurses the rage of heaven till it bursts out in the roaring of mighty thunders and the withering glare of lightning. But 'tis little, my darlint, that you have to do with the thunder-cloud and destructive illimints, dressed, as becomes you, for the gala like a radiant queen of gladness or one of the janii of the deep."

To which magnificent address Miss Avalon, in a very matter-of-fact voice, but with no lack of cordiality, responded, "How d'ye do, Nora? I was telling Mr. Avalon the other day that I had not seen you for weeks. You have not been to see us lately."

"When I preshume to drag my clumsy ould carcase up the Foy Road and pay my respects to the lady of Fairmead," returned Nora, speaking in a whining and at the same time pompous

tone, that combined in a very ludicrous manner self-abasement and impudence, “it is that I may offer Miss Avalon some fruit that’s fit eating for the fairest lady of Quebec. But sorry little is the really prime fruit that Nora M’Carthy can buy in open market in those hard times. Apples and pears, street-pines and garden-sauce, good enough for rabble, but no proper meat for such as you, are the stock that Nora dales in now-a-days, though time was she had a shop in a tidy street out in St. Rock’s parish, and may be comes of as ould blood and as much regal descint as half of those who’d think it scorn to be seen speaking to her. And, Miss Avalon, you wouldn’t have me so far forget my riverince to you as to offer you such fruit as ne’er a servant in Fairmead would think of picking from the trees or the ground of your garden for her mistress’s table.”

“ You have made enough pretty speeches for to-day,” Felicia Avalon interposed bluntly, so that her humble friend might not embarrass her with another outbreak of grotesque flattery. “ And you can’t suppose, Nora, that I am silly enough

to believe all your smooth talk and outrageous compliments, when I know that you go about Quebec talking in the same ridiculous fashion to every lady who is foolish enough to listen to you,—ay, and every woman old or young, gentle or simple, whom you can wheedle into buying a cent's worth of fruit of you."

"Go on, Miss Avalon," answered Nora, in a natural and pathetic tone, whilst she adopted a strain that, notwithstanding its innocence of adulatory purpose, was far more calculated to gratify her patroness's self-love than any designed compliments could have been, "rate me soundly and call me a lying old fool, and bid me keep my glosings, and fictions, and sinful falsehoods for those who care to be fawned on even by beggars. A good scoulding from you goes like music to my heart, and makes me feel as if I was once again a girl in ould Oireland, with a lady over me to taach me manners, and give me discipline if I broke the priest's bidding. There's many a one to swear and gibe at ould Nora, to scorn and slander her, ay, and to give her stick and kick when liquor

is in and dacent manners out; but in all Canada there's only one who ivver condescinds to dale out iddefying reproofs to my poor soul, and scould me charitably as though I was a Christian sinner with the infarmities of age upon me, and etarnity near at hand."

"I am sorry that you like my scoldings so much," returned Miss Avalon, shaking her head with comical gravity. "That's the reason they do you so little good. I believe you do wrong for the sake of the pure excitement of being called to order by me. But in all good faith, Nora, you should keep your tongue in better government; for you are an old body, and every day growing so much older, that you can't hope to be here much longer. At most it won't be many years before you'll be called to account for what you have done. And you may call them glosings and fictions, and give them whatever other pleasant names you please, but all those absurd flatteries and dishonest praises with which you try to curry favour with your betters are nothing else but so many crafty lies."

“Don’t be too hard on me, darlint,” whimpered Nora, “or you’ll just drive me beyond myself into a pinnytintial howling and wailing that will scare you into fits, and bring a crowd upon us. And yet you doos manage it sweetly. No priest could do it better. Och, and mayn’t I be punished for saying so; but the world has better sisters of charity than those that wear black bombazeen and ugly caps. Of course I am a great reptile and manufacturer to tell so many lies, although I am a poor woman, and lies are strangely useful in the way of business. But don’t be too hard on me, darlint, in a public place, where a crowd would gather if I groaned in sperrit for my soul’s ease.”

“Then you must come to the Fairmead tomorrow for the rest of the scolding,” observed Miss Avalon, consenting, out of respect for the penitent’s feelings and menaces, to torture her no more for the present. “Bring your baskets empty, Nora, for I think you can find in my garden a stock of fruit that won’t need to be commended to your customers by glosings and fictions. Moreover, I found the other day a

queer old black bottle, as round as a cricket-ball, and furnished with the drollest little neck and mouth imaginable, which I told Mr. Avalon would be just the bottle for your pocket, when you have to spend the bitter days of the cold months hanging about street-corners."

"If ivver an angel in human form," exclaimed Nora, suddenly lifted from the depths of contrition, and thrown off her guard by the munificence of the lady whom the poor creature regarded more affectionately than any other being on the earth's surface.

"Not another word in that way," interposed Felicia Avalon, promptly putting a stop to what she feared would prove another extravagant outpouring of Nora's adulatory eloquence.

"Och!" expostulated the scarcely manageable Nora, who had achieved such a recognised position as the privileged prater and gossip-monger of the Quebec thoroughfares, that she felt herself free to say whatever she pleased to the quality of the town, "it's hard on a poor crittur, when her heart is stirred, to forbid her to reveale the feelings that do her credit. But

Miss Avalon's orders are not the commands that ould Nora M'Carthy would dare to disobey. Still, you'll let me bid you 'God speed.' There, there, away wid you—away wid you!" added this eccentric daughter of the Emerald Isle, suddenly exchanging a dolorous for a jubilant tone, when she had rubbed two rising tears back into her eyes with her fists. "Pass on, in all your radiance and rich attire, and ould Nora will stand by and watch you walking down to the Gardens, where all the nobility and gentility are walking up and down, listening, as aristocracy should, to bands a-playing martial chunes. Sweep on, my darlint, attended, as you should be, by your brave cavalier walking by your side, while he tries to blind your eyes to his feelings, and win you for the game of life. Och, and blithe will be the day when I see you make a prudent choice, and go off for a longer walk than an afternoon's promenade—ay, for a walk down the sunny slopes of life with a proper man for your humble servant."

"By Jove!" Major Tilbury remarked in an

undertone to his companion, "our egregious apple-woman is giving you some good advice after all."

"After all! Is it then so rare for an apple-woman to talk sinse?" asked Nora, with an impudent smile on her uncouth face. "But mind you, Meejor Tilbury, the agragious ould apple-woman nivver even so much as hinted that you were a proper man for so high an impiement. You're well enough for an hour's pastime in a crowded flower-garden. And I don't say that you're not a gallant man to look at, though you're getting, something like me, too big in the girth, and are just ten years older than you were half-a-score years since. But don't preshume—don't preshume. Who are you that should dare to aspire to my lady's hand? A meejor, that's all! Hoot, your honour, go to the wars and work your way to top o' the ladder; become Cunnel, Ginneral, Field-Marshal, Commander-in-chief; and even then if I saw you on your bended knees preferring your shute and proffering your service to Miss Avalon, I should say, "You're seeking a higher

honour than any you have won!' But what marvel if you do preshume, when Miss Avalon deigns to let you wait upon her through the strates o' Quebic."

By the sentiment of which counsel, and still more by the significant leers and winks with which it was given, Major Joseph Curtain Tilbury was so much dissatisfied and put out of countenance, that he was thankful to escape from what threatened to become a ludicrous and embarrassing position, by following in the wake of Miss Avalon, who, without giving the egregious apple-woman a formal farewell, proceeded on her way to the promenade, from which she had been absent for something like half-an-hour.

CHAPTER IV.

THE CASTLE GARDENS.

NOT many cities can boast of so convenient and picturesque a ground for promenade and open-air recreation as the Castle Gardens of Quebec. Occupying the site and contiguous spaces of the vice-regal residence that was destroyed by conflagration in 1834, they extend from Des Carrières Street on the north to the extreme verge of the cliff that overlooks and all but overhangs the Lower Town ; from which gallery the spectator commands an unbroken view of the St. Lawrence, rolling its mighty current towards the Atlantic, between banks scarcely more remarkable for the grandeur and diversity of their natural beauties than for the attractions which human labour has bestowed

on one of the most superb landscapes known to travellers.

And on the occasion to which the reader's attention is now directed, the Castle Gardens were seen under highly favourable, if not the best possible, circumstances. The gorgeous hues of the Rhododendrons had already disappeared from the inclosure, of which they are, during a few weeks in each year, a conspicuous ornament; but whilst the blaze of hundreds of well-grown azaleas imparted brilliance and light to the inner lawn, the green turf and abundant foliage of the ornamental trees were brightened in every direction by a lavish display of scarlet geraniums and other splendid flowers. Visible in a retired part of the arboretum, was a tent gaudily decorated with flags, amongst which might be found the bunting of nearly every nation in the universe. Under the canvas of this marquee ices of delicious properties and effervescent drinks of barbaric or pleasantly-wicked names were supplied to the promenaders who thronged its approaches on every cessation in the music, which two military

bands, playing alternately from their appointed stations on two canopied platforms, created for the delectation of a company some three thousand strong.

In that company were congregated all the principal personages of Quebec, and a number of official dignitaries and colonial celebrities who had been drawn from various parts of Canada to the ancient capital of our chief British-American dependency. The Governor-general and the ladies of his family, attended by a proper staff of *aides-de-camp* and courtiers, were on the ground, together with two noble guests, members of the English Peerage, whose patrician rank and titles rendered them especially acceptable to the democratic gentlefolk of the French-English community. Each of the learned professions were represented at the meeting by its most conspicuous members, and a large contingent of aspirants for the highest employments and honours of their vocation. Yonder, with his chaplain at his heels, a dame of high standing in Quebec on either side, and a line of inferior ladies forming in his rear a suitable train

of gentle admirers, walked the Bishop of the diocese, a broad-featured, swarthy, black-eyed gentleman, with a cheery greeting for every good Anglican churchman, and no tendency to blush for the short-comings of his official petticoat, although he was well aware that his black-stockinged ankles and big feet were grotesquely conspicuous under his episcopal drapery. Here and there strangers stumbled upon a cute-looking and jaunty but withal fogeyish personage, of whom the said strangers were informed in an undertone that he was Mr. Justice So-and-so, a puisne judge of the Quebec Court of Queen's Bench. Music being his favourite diversion, it is needless to say that the Chief-Justice was also in the Gardens; and it being equally notorious that the Chief-Justice was never allowed to enter general society unless attended by his somewhat imperious wife and three stout daughters, it may be taken for granted that Lady Slingsby, with her favourite retired colonel in attendance, and the Misses Slingsby, each with two junior members of the Quebec bar competing for the possession of her

virginal affections, contributed to the magnitude and lustre of the galaxy. Senators entitled, much to their wives' satisfaction, to the appellation of Honourable, and senators whose honour had not yet risen to a point recognizable by heralds, were treading on one another's toes or each other's wives' dresses in every avenue to the refreshment marquee. An important military stronghold, and a garrison in high repute with martial coteries as a most agreeable station for captain or subaltern with a natural aptitude for skating, and a soldier-like taste for promiscuous and unlimited flirtation, Quebec is always well provided with officers ; and upon the present occasion the show of gentlemen, holding their lives in their hands for the preservation of England's honour, was equal to the reasonable expectations of the several scores, if not hundreds, of young ladies who, like their old acquaintance or particular friend, Felicia Avalon, were of the deliberate opinion that small-talk, waltzing, and costume were arts in which civilians can rarely compete with bellicose practitioners.

Nor may the chronicler fail to mention how

largely the civil service, and the commercial sets, and the vocationless gentry of Quebec (the last-named element being an important power in the permanent population of the town) contributed to the assembly in the Castle Gardens. Every branch of that irrepressible and universally fortunate family, the Ommanies of Quebec, was represented in the crowd by sumptuously-attired women or red-faced men. Sir Peter Carteret—chief of the banking-house “Carteret, Galsworthy and Greeder,” and a gentleman known in certain august circles to have sighed in vain for Felicia Avalon’s hand—stalked stiffly over the inner lawn before the commencement of the concert, and never left the grounds until the bands had together played the national anthem. To make which announcement is equivalent to saying that every merchant, known honourably on the floor of the Quebec Exchange, and not then oppressed by bodily sickness or other urgent domestic affliction, was at the promenade; for eleven years since Sir Peter’s will was law to his commercial brethren of Quebec, who, with the alacrity of well-drilled soldiers,

were wont to draw their handkerchiefs from their pockets, as soon as they saw their chief take preliminary measures for the blowing of his own nose. On the other hand, it must be admitted that, besides the capitalists honoured on 'Change, the Lower Town, where the merchants of Quebec do congregate, had thrown into the Gardens not a few choice specimens of speculative riff-raff, whom Sir Peter never deigned to recognise with a nod, though he condescended to take care of their money. Also, the promenade being accessible by means of a rather large pecuniary payment to all persons having any tincture of respectability, it must be conceded that, qualifying the majority of manifest gentle-folk, whose dress and style differed but little from the fashion and air of well-bred English people in Kensington Gardens or Regent's Park, there were visible some comical specimens of ill-kept and grotesquely-clothed humanity. But upon the whole, it was a scene of pomp and gaiety, of brightness and exhilaration, and none the less fraught with pleasant influences, or likely to rouse agreeable

associations, because a certain excess of colour in the habiliments of the promenaders, and a peculiar richness of tone in the hum and babble of the assembly, intimated that the Irish were neither less numerous nor less dominant in the more affluent classes of Quebec than in the humble grade where Mrs. McCarthy found her equals.

On making a slow and sinuous way through this congregation of neighbours and notabilities, Felicia Avalon was required at nearly every step to acknowledge one of the many greetings which, whilst testifying to the regard entertained for her by her acquaintance, evidenced also that the re-union had received a considerable influx of new attendants since she had quitted it for her excursion to the post-office. Had the curious observer required any additional indication of the lady's social condition, he would have found it in the cordiality with which she was accosted by those who, from the obsequious attentions of the crowd, were seen to be personages of importance. The Governor-General, it was observed, came ten yards out

of his way to exchange words of courtesy with **Miss Avalon**, when she had made a divergence from the direct line to her aunt's seat, in order that she might escape his Excellency's observation. Sir Peter Carteret raised his hat and bowed profoundly to the stately girl, whose presence imparted to his cheeks a colour which heightened the effect of his grey locks. Crossing her path at the foot of a floral trophy, which the Gardens' Committee had raised for the temporary adornment of their pleasure-ground, the Bishop of the Anglican Church detained her for a brief gossip. His lordship had not seen **Miss Avalon**'s brother for several weeks, and hoped sincerely that his exertions in his cure and for the unhappy inmates of the Quebec gaol, did not overtax his powers. Far be it from a bishop to discountenance zeal in his clergy, but **Mr. Avalon** unfortunately was by no means so strong as his friends could wish him to be. It would be a thousand pities if so exemplary a parish priest diminished his powers of usefulness by indiscretion. And scarcely had his Anglican lordship moved onwards, with en-

couragement on his lips for another lady of our national church, when his Catholic lordship, Monseigneur Hippolyte Rigaud, took Miss Avalon's hand in his episcopal grip, and gave her most precise and altogether needless directions as to the spot where she might find her pious and charming aunt, Mademoiselle Messurier.

Moreover, the student of manners, then and there watching Miss Avalon's demeanour, and having a familiar knowledge of the constituents of Quebec society, would not have failed to observe that in her distribution of smiles and verbal courtesies to her many acquaintances, she was certainly in no degree less cordial to her humble than to her great friends. The salute with which she acknowledged the Earl of Wimbledon's deferential obeisance was no whit more expressive of interest and sympathetic concern than the greeting that she accorded to little Jack Gandy, Mus. Doc., the knock-kneed organist of the Protestant cathedral; and the Honourable Mrs. Muspratt, wife of the Honourable Secretary Muspratt—who, in

consideration of her husband's senatorial rank, about which she made a needless to-do, and her grand house at the corner of Durham Terrace, to which she was wont to invite all the world of Quebec, and her separate estate, to which she was perpetually making boastful allusions to her acquaintance, was regarded by her toadies as the Queen of Quebec during the customary absence of the Governor-General's lady—would have deemed herself to have been slighted by her dear Felicia's response to her greeting, had she witnessed the air of delight with which Miss Avalon seized Madame Noir's hand, as though that somewhat eccentric and extremely dilapidated teacher of Parisian French were her closest friend. From which and other like demonstrations of mere politeness to her grander acquaintance, and of affectionate warmth to her less fortunate friends, the student afore-mentioned of manners and deportment would have been justified in inferring that, not content with her secure position in the *beau monde* of her native city, Miss Avalon was sufficiently amiable to be ambitious of

achieving a reputation for complaisance and universal considerateness.

On regaining the seat which Aunt (or, to speak precisely, Great-Aunt) Messurier had jealously guarded and retained for her, Miss Avalon, by a timely and significant expression of thanks for his past services, dismissed Major Tilbury from further attendance upon her in a manner that, without affording any disturbance to that gentleman's self-love, compelled him to turn elsewhere for amusement, and in his retreat enable a young clergyman to approach her chair.

Had not the striking resemblance borne by this young clergyman to Miss Messurier's ward stated their relationship with unmistakeable clearness, the pleasure which illuminated her countenance so soon as she saw him approaching her, might have occasioned the uninformed spectator a suspicion that Miss Avalon was only biding her time to join the gracious and devout army of clerical wives. But the singular similitude of Felix and Felicia Avalon rendered such a misapprehension impossible.

To see them together for ten seconds was to know that they were brother and sister. In either were observable the same characteristics that distinguished the other. The same handsome profile, and largely moulded but finely formed lips, the same dark eyes and arching eyebrows, the same rich, brown hair, and bloodless, olive complexion, that contributed to the sister's peculiar attractiveness, were present in the brother's physical endowments. On a microscopic comparison of the two faces, it was seen that even in their most delicate lines and shadows, no less than in their general design, the one was a precise reproduction of the other. To make this marvellous resemblance all the more striking, the possession of those facial growths of hair, which usually proclaim the sex of the adult male, had been denied to Felix Avalon, whose lips and cheeks were so perfectly devoid of even the first signs of moustache and whisker, that in his twenty-sixth year he was as downless and smooth-faced as any girl of eighteen summers.

And yet the contrast between the brother

and sister was only by a few degrees less remarkable than their similarity. Though they were no less alike in height than in countenance, the stature which gave to Felicia the air and dignity of tallness barely preserved Felix from an appearance of meanness, if not of diminutiveness. Whilst the sister's straight and therefore defective figure, by reason of its altitude, rendered her remarkable amongst her sex for majestic presence, the brother, without falling short of Felicia's height by so much as the tithe of a barleycorn, had under no circumstances the effect of masculine greatness, and on standing by her side, almost seemed an undersized person. A corresponding deficiency of force and largeness was observable in the countenance of the brother, whose face appeared, in some perplexing way, to be smaller, slighter, weaker than his sister's, though the most precise comparison and measurement of their two heads would have found them almost identical in massiveness and weight, as well as in conformation. In short, the features and expression which appeared masculine in the young woman, seemed effeminate in

the somewhat younger man. Moreover, to complete the sum of the differences observable in this startlingly similar pair: whilst Felicia Avalon, notwithstanding her total freedom from unfeminine robustness, displayed the signs of an unusually vigorous constitution in her bodily erectness and charming air of gracious self-possession and physical self-enjoyment, her brother bore the equally unmistakeable indications of constitutional debility in the slight roundness of his shoulders and corresponding contraction of his chest, in the nervous indecision of his steps, and in the equally pathetic and indescribable air of weariness and resignation that suffering is prone to impart to the face of the chronic invalid.

CHAPTER V.

MISS MESSURIER DISAPPROVES OF MAJOR TILBURY.

IN speaking of Felix Avalon's delicate appearance, I must preserve the reader from the error of thinking him a pale-faced curate, with the languishing air that is generally believed to render young clergymen attractive to sentimental ladies. At heart and in temper no man was less effeminate than Felicia Avalon's brother, who never allowed the physical weakness, of which he was reminded by the circumstances of each of his laborious days, to be an excuse for indolence, or a reason why he should spare himself in the performance of his professional duties. The infirmity of constitution, which had denied him the ordinary pleasures of boyhood, and planted in his mind a conviction

that he would never attain to the threshold of middle age, far from subduing his courage, inspired him with an heroic resoluteness in combating the depressing influences of bodily affliction ; and though his affectionate nature caused him to prize human sympathy at its full worth, the masculine pride of his sensitive spirit would have repelled the interest which had the appearance of springing from commiseration of his bodily deficiencies. Even the sister, who had been the nurse of his suffering youth, and whose solicitude had enabled him to survive the maladies of his boyhood, was seldom allowed to treat him as though he were less stalwart than other men ; and though he was strongly averse to insincerity or affectation of any kind, I am disposed to think that, had he suspected how manifest to others was the weakness of which he was so vividly conscious, he would have had recourse to artifice for the concealment of his chronic indisposition, and would have hidden the languor of his limbs beneath an assumed air of excessive vigour.

Nor let it be imagined that the clear prevision

of his premature death, and the resignation with which he anticipated his fate, were attended with any visible sadness or secret depression. Quebec contained no young man who appeared more thoroughly than Felix to relish the innocent diversions of society, or who contributed more to the gaiety of the circles in which he moved. In his considerate expressions to Felicia respecting her brother's clerical zeal, the Bishop had spoken no words of mere politeness or insincere courtesy; for the conscientious assiduity with which the young incumbent of St. Anne's, Stanislaus Street, discharged his official duty to a numerous and humble flock, whilst he also found time and strength for the equally efficient performance of work devolving upon him as chaplain of the Quebec gaol, was an affair of notoriety to all persons interested in the social condition of the city. And yet with all his work in the classes of his parochial school, the homes of the poor, and the cells of a prison, Felix Avalon—"Foxe Avalon's boy," as he was affectionately designated by his father's old friends—went to as many dinner-parties

and drawing-room assemblies in the course of a year as any officer in the whole garrison of Quebec. Amongst the conversationalists of the capital he had achieved a reputation for humour and vivaciousness, without ever incurring a charge of flippancy. At the whist-club it was allowed by competent and severe judges that he played almost as good a rubber as his father of pleasant memory; and, though on taking orders he had ceased to waltz, out of respect to those who regarded dancing as an unclerical accomplishment, he seldom failed to attend his sister to the balls and routs, where she maintained a reputation, acquired several years since, of being the best dancer in Quebec. Moreover, far from allowing that the exercise of the ball-room was no altogether fit pastime for men of sacred vocation, he had no scruple in confessing the self-sacrifice it cost him to forbear from taking active part in an amusement which appeared to him alike agreeable and beneficial. Thus, if from some points of view the youthful incumbent of St. Anne's was a model clergyman to all observers, to some few of those who re-

garded other aspects of his life he appeared less chargeable with asceticism and austerity than with an earthly love of the world, from which he looked forward to taking an early departure.

“Here already! at least half an hour sooner than I expected you,” observed Felicia Avalon to her brother.

“Henderson’s head-ache,” explained the newcomer, “was good enough to take its leave just about the time when, in the ordinary course of things, it ought to have reached the height of violence; whereupon the schoolmaster-in-chief was at liberty to leave the children in the hands of their ordinary teacher, and move off in the pursuit of pleasure.”

“That man is always having a headache,” Felicia remarked tetchily, “and putting his work on you, who have always more than enough to do.”

“Yes, poor fellow,” assented Felix, “he has more than an average man’s share of ill-health.”

“And less than an average man’s share of fortitude.”

“The more the pity for him.”

“Not from me, Felix. He complains a great deal too much. If he suffered more he would grumble less.”

“If he suffered more, it would perhaps be easier for him to suffer manfully. Small annoyances are sometimes harder to endure than great griefs. Moreover, if he endured bravely, he would be cheered by a consciousness of a kind of heroism that would at least give him the solace of self-respect,” Felix observed generously of his school-master and church-clerk, who greatly needed a little of his master’s quiet fortitude under his share of fleshly ills. “But,” he added, “let us forget poor Henderson’s ailments and grievances. I am out for enjoyment, and am of opinion, my dear aunt, that you had better contribute to my pleasure by letting me trot you round the gardens.”

On learning that Aunt Messurier had no disposition for exercise, but preferred sitting in the sun, and watching the restless throng from her seat, Felix transferred the rejected invitation to his sister, who rose promptly from

the seat, which she had scarcely resumed, and went off with her brother to look for friends, and pick up chat, when not paying attention to the music.

When the brother and sister returned half an hour afterwards to Aunt Messurier—a tall and extremely attenuated old lady, whose regular profile, flat forehead, protruding eyes, and severe gentility of aspect were well-known to the frequenters of the choicest drawing-rooms of Quebec—the two bands were playing “God save the Queen,” and the assembly was manifesting symptoms of immediate dissolution. At which moment Major Tilbury, who, after receiving his *congé* of dismissal, had been incessantly on the watch for an opportunity of fastening himself again on Felicia Avalon, saw an opening, which he promptly turned to account, for the achievement of his purpose. A gentlewoman in appearance, from the topmost plume of her fantastic head-dress to the lowest flounce of her dull crimson dress, Miss Messurier had raised herself to the full height of her lathe-

like frame, and was listlessly accepting her grand-nephew's proffered arm, when the artilleryman quietly came up behind Felicia, just as she was falling back dutifully in the rear of her extremely incompetent and highly picturesque chaperon.

“Allow me to help you through the crowd to your carriage, which you may have some difficulty in finding, for the crush of equipages in Des Carrières Street and the Place d'Armes is worthy of London.”

“Thank you, Major Tilbury, my brother is with us, and our coachman will be on the lookout for us.”

“Your brother will have enough to do in taking care of Miss Messurier.”

“You are very kind.”

“Moreover, I have something else to say to you.”

“Indeed!”

“A petition to prefer.”

“It should be a trifling one for the petitioner to urge it in public, when——”

“The first waltz with you, Miss Avalon, this evening at Mrs. Audubon’s.”

“You have yet to ascertain that I shall be there.”

“Surely not. Mrs. Audubon, of the Grove, has a dance to-night; all the best people of Quebec go to Mrs. Audubon’s parties. Miss Avalon is the best of the best people of Quebec —*ergo*, as we used to say at Woolwich, after the manner of the precise Euclid, Miss Avalon will be at Mrs. Audubon’s, Q. E. D. What can be clearer?”

“Your inference is neither groundless nor incorrect; but as we are engaged to a rather late dinner, it is not probable that I shall arrive at the Grove in time for the first waltz.”

“Of course I am entreating for the first after your arrival.”

“To allow you to pre-engage me in that way would not be fair to those who may pay me the compliment of seeking me for their partner when I have entered Mrs. Audubon’s drawing-room. You are forestalling the market, Major Tilbury—a heinous offence against fair play.”

“Anyhow, I shall wait and watch for you. No one shall anticipate me in asking you to dance as soon as you brighten the assembly.”

“In that case, you shall not have waited and watched in vain.”

“Ah!” urged Joseph Tilbury in a low voice, “I wish you would promise me as much for every request that I may find the courage to put to you, Miss Avalon, after much waiting and watching.”

Looking her suitor full in the face, whilst they paused in the grand avenue, dead-locked for a minute in the crush of people crowding through the great gate into Des Carrières Street, Miss Avalon replied, with a perplexing air of mingled seriousness and jocosity—“You have your wish. I promise to give the fullest consideration to every request that you may urge upon me”—and then, with a tantalizing inflection of her voice, she added, after ten seconds’ pause—“provided the request is reasonable. Of course, it must be within the bounds of reason.”

“That won’t content me,” Joseph Tilbury re-

turned warmly, and with an earnestness that was all the more impressive, because his voice was lowered so as to be inaudible to everyone but himself and the woman with whom he believed himself to be in love. "The request *will* be unreasonable, and yet I shall force it upon you. By Jove! I would urge it now, in this most unfit of all conceivable places, if you would give me so much as a glance of encouragement."

If Joseph Tilbury hoped to extort from Miss Avalon the look of encouragement which would have given him confidence enough to reveal then and there the nature of his unreasonable desire, he was disappointed; for, instead of evincing even the faintest satisfaction at his guarded declaration, Felicia, after looking for twenty seconds as though she could not understand him, observed coldly, "This is high nonsense for you to be talking, when you ought to be looking out for our carriage—" without a pause she added, in a suddenly altered voice, "Look, Major Tilbury, there's William; I was sure he would be near the gate. Felix, you are

looking in the wrong direction. The carriage is on the other side of the gate."

In less than another three minutes Miss Avalon's carriage—a roomy but modest vehicle, built much in the fashion of the Long Acre landau of the present date, drawn by a single big bay horse of handsome shape and showy action, and driven by a white-headed coachman who had served the Avalons from boyhood—had drawn up before the entrance to the Gardens.

"Drop Miss Messurier at her house, and then—home. Thank you, Major Tilbury, for looking after my sister," said Felix, as he took his seat with his back to the big bay animal, which leaped up thrice ere it deigned to settle into its collar, and then bore the carriage northwards at a canter, which the white-headed coachman promptly moderated to a swinging trot.

But though the big bay horse made good speed, it was not pulled up sharp at the door of Miss Messurier's small house, hard by the City Hall, at the corner of St. Lewis and St. Ursule Streets, ere that sharp-featured lady had

given emphatic utterance to her disapprobation of Major Tilbury, to the mingled surprise and amusement of Felicia Avalon, who was not accustomed to hear her aunt speak so decidedly in the disfavour of a mere acquaintance.

“I don’t like that officer,” observed the old lady, tartly.

“Indeed,” rejoined Felicia, “what has he done to offend you?”

“Paid me clumsy compliments. He is too free-and-easy. He talks slang, and has not the decency to keep himself pure of tobacco-smoke when he enters the society of ladies. He pays you a great deal too much attention, Felicia. You should keep him more at a distance.”

“His style is not so perfect as he imagines, aunt,” replied Felicia, “but he tries to be entertaining, and that’s something to the credit of a man in these days, when men think it in good tone to affect dulness. He always has plenty to say for himself.”

“In an insufferably impudent manner,” spitefully interposed the old lady, sitting bolt upright.

“His brother-officers speak well of him. Indeed, he is popular with the whole garrison.”

“Indeed,” rejoined the hostile Miss Messurier; “I am sorry, for the garrison’s sake, to hear it. The tone of the military profession must have deteriorated prodigiously since I was a girl, if such a man, a vain egotist, is generally esteemed by the officers of Her Majesty’s army. Don’t you agree with me, Felix?”

Admitting that he cherished no strong liking for Major Tilbury, Felix urged that the culprit had his commendable qualities. He excelled in athletic sports; rode well, shot well, skated better than any other man in garrison, and was reputed to be an efficient officer. The young clergyman, whose want of physical stamina had never allowed him to acquire passable proficiency in masculine pastimes, had such an admiration of the muscular prowess of vigorous men that he was always disposed to think favourably of the stalwart and active of his own sex.

Finding that she could not induce Felix to support her attack upon the gentleman who

had offended her by praising Canada in a patronizing style that revealed his secret disdain for Canadians, Miss Messurier dismissed the topic with a significant toss of her head, and lapsed into silence, which she maintained for the rest of her drive.

But though it had pleased Felicia to speak in Major Tilbury's defence, she did not in her heart dissent from her aunt's judgment of his style. Indeed, if the truth may be told at once of a matter that will be discussed more fully by-and-by, Miss Messurier's dislike of the noisy officer was lenient and flattering in comparison with the sentiment of disdainful abhorrence which her niece cherished for him. And whilst Felicia and her brother drove in silence homewards, after dropping their aged relative at her antiquated residence in the Old Town, Miss Messurier's ward thought to herself—"Yes, the man's badness arms against him those who have no positive proofs of its existence. It is not his vulgarity, which is obvious to every woman of discernment, but the evil of his nature, which he hides under an affectation of

kindly temper and boisterous affability, that sets Aunt Messurier at war with him. He is a dangerous man, all the more so because he is not altogether deficient in cunning and tact, though his egregious vanity continually causes him to irritate those whom he is most anxious to please. He is not the mere pleasure-loving fool that he pretends to be. On the contrary, he has cleverness of a mean sort, and more knowledge than he cares to reveal. How strange that a man of average powers and education should find gratification for an exorbitant vanity in assuming the mask of a simpleton! Will he ever dare to tell me in plain words that he loves me? A short time will show. Self-interest, self-conceit, and every mean motive that is calculated to inspire a selfish nature with a sentiment which it can mistake for love, are urging him onwards to his bitter humiliation."

And whilst Felicia Avalon was occupied with these and similar thoughts, their object was walking leisurely towards the artillery-barracks in a state of agreeable elation that rendered

him unobservant of the admiration with which he was stared at by a group of street-urchins in whose estimation Major Tilbury—"the officer" who won the Gentleman's Cup at the last Quebec races—was a truly heroic personage.

"Everything goes well," Joseph Curtain Tilbury remarked to himself, as he walked with the true military lounge in the direction of Palace Gate, and none the worse for his morning's discovery. "'Messrs. Hobson and Holliday, 15, Sackville Street, Piccadilly, London:' ay, that was the address of the letter which my queenly Felicia dropped into the letter-box. When she is Mrs. Tilbury, I shan't allow her to have any secret dealings with those most fashionable of West End publishers. I wonder what she earns by writing for them. When Jack Slider went to grief, his wife brought him round again by manufacturing novels. Perhaps Felicia will net her £1,000 a-year by the scribbling business—not a bad addition to the income we shall have from her money and my little savings, to say nothing of my 'pay.' But, by my peculiar star, I must take care not to quarrel

with her, or she will have her revenge by exhibiting me in three volumes, octavo, as a monster of iniquity, given over to licence and latchkey. Poor Jack Slider caught it hot and sharp when Mrs. S. put him into a book. ‘Only a Wife,’ in three vols., was the cause why Jack was black-balled at the Rag. Joseph Curtain Tilbury, you dog, you must be a model of domestic virtue when you have taken a woman of letters for better and worse. It is a fearful thing, my dear friend, to fall into the hands of a literary wife when you have done her wrong.”

After a pause in his meditations, Major Tilbury bethought himself yet further, as he turned into the chief court of his barracks—“To make assurance doubly sure that she is the author of ‘Marjory Gatkin: or Sketches of High Life in a British American Colony,’ I’ll ask Ned Canton for particulars. Ned advises Hobson and Holliday in all their commercial ventures, and will be sure to know who wrote the ‘Canadian Sketches.’ By-the-by, Ned dined me and old Hobson once upon a time at

his club. To be sure, he did. Hobson is a stout, florid old boy, who called himself 'Obson,' and insisted on having another bottle of port when Ned proposed an adjournment to the smoking-room. The time may come when I may give the bibulous Hobson a dînér, and come to terms with him over a second bottle of port for my wife's next novel."



CHAPTER VI.

THE AVALONS OF THE FAIRMEAD.

WHILST surveying the memorial tablets which are conspicuously placed in the walls of the plain but sufficiently commodious Protestant Cathedral of Quebec, the sight-seer of the Canadian capital is likely to observe, at a point hard by the Richmond monument, a mural stone that bears the following inscription:—"In memory of Colonel Stephen Foxe Avalon, C.B., sprung from the Ancient House of the Avalons of Gloucestershire in England, who died at his Residence of Fairmead, in the Neighbourhood of this Capital, A.D. 1856, in the seventy-sixth year of his age. Having distinguished himself in several of the Chief Battles of the Peninsular War, and received an almost

Fatal Wound at Waterloo, Colonel Avalon emigrated to Canada and settled in Quebec, where his Estimable Social Qualities won for him the Cordial Affection of his Fellow-citizens of all Parties and both Religions. Colonel Avalon married Marie Messurier, one of the Co-heiresses of Nicholas Messurier, Seigneur of Tregeux and Serquiny, by which Accomplished and Amiable Lady, who died A.D. 1835, and was interred near the Dust of several of her Ancestors in the Catholic Cathedral of this City, he had two Children, who lived to mourn their Loss of a Loving Father." Above this somewhat wordy legend the observer may see the heraldic portraiture of a shield impaling the arms of Avalon and Messurier, whilst beneath it may be read the rather trite reflection, "In Coelo Quies."

The story of Stephen Foxe Avalon's early manhood is so singular a romance, and the circumstances, which drove him from Europe to a Transatlantic refuge with a bleeding and all but broken heart, were so strangely tragic that, if I could persuade myself to disregard prudence and the rules of art, I would burden these pages

with a chapter not immediately conducive to their main story, and give the particulars of a sad and dismal episode in a gallant gentleman's career. But since this narrative must concern itself chiefly with the fortunes of Foxe Avalon's children, from whom it would be unwise to withdraw the reader's attention, I will leave the recital of their father's earlier sorrows for a more convenient occasion, and pursue the main purpose of the present work.

Though it may not say much for his spiritual earnestness, it speaks favourably for Colonel Avalon's freedom from polemical bitterness, that, whilst maintaining a character for sincere attachment to the religious institutions of his native land, he was received with equal confidence and affection by the Catholic and Protestant families of his adopted city. It was also creditable to his amiable temper and courteous breeding that, though officially employed and privately interested to support the policy of the Imperial government of the colony, he cherished feelings of friendship for his most resolute political opponents, and even during crises of ex-

treme revolutionary excitement, maintained pleasant social relations with the chiefs of all the various parties and factions of the two provinces. A place-holder under government, he never failed in loyalty to his sovereign, or roused the animosities of the reforming Liberals or the extreme Republicans. A soldier, whose courage and capacity had been tested in hard-fought fields, he possessed the finer qualities, whilst preserving his intelligence and temper from the ordinary prejudices, of military men. Though he conscientiously believed that every defeat of the English Tories was a misfortune to the whole British people, he was never wanting in charity and politeness to Toryism's extremest opponents, of whose views he used to say, betwixt pinches of his much-prized prince's mixture, "The Radicals are in most cases honest and fairly intelligent men; they mean well enough, sir, but their views are deplorable—absolutely deplorable." And so completely was he the master of social opinion in both of the national divisions of Canadian society, that his marriage with a lady of French descent and

the unreformed religion was regarded with equal favour by the English Protestants and French Catholics. Moreover, it is well for readers to know that Colonel Avalon was not more proud of his pedigree or his Peninsular medals, than of his unique popularity with all classes of his fellow-colonists. The epitaph which commemorated it was a composition on which the Colonel himself expended much thought during his last illness.

When Foxe Avalon married Marie Messurier twice on the same day—once in the old Catholic cathedral on the antique market-place, and again in the modern Episcopal church in the Place d'Armes—he was no longer a young man, though time had imparted no unwieldy massiveness to his commanding figure, or given many white threads to his bushy brows, ample whiskers, and abundant crop of thick and strongly-curling hair. Truth to tell, he wanted but three days of his fiftieth birthday when Marie Messurier assumed the name of Avalon, and resolved to be an obedient wife, to the best of her feminine ability. It is

by no means improbable that Quebec babbled and gossiped a little about the considerable discrepancy between the ages of the bride and her groom ; for though Marie Messurier was no recently-emancipated school-girl, but a woman who had loved and lost her first love long ere she ever thought of becoming Foxe Avalon's wife, it could not be denied that she was at least twenty years younger than her husband. On no other point, however, could Quebec find aught to object against Marie's selection of a lord and lot in life. The religious question was no difficulty under the circumstances of her mature womanhood and his unexceptionable character for gentlemanlike devoutness. With respect to position and material advantages, the two were as nearly equal as matrimonially-disposed man and woman could be. If the Colonel was a member of one of the oldest families in Gloucestershire, the Quebec Messuriers had descended from a peer of France whom Louis the Fourteenth and the great Turenne had covered with honours and eulogy, in requital for brilliant military services. Nor was the match unequal

in respect of the pecuniary endowments of the lady and her chosen partner. Marie's share of the money resulting from the sale of Nicholas Messurier's estate was little short of £16,000, a large fortune for a Quebec heiress ; but no one could think that considerable sum of money an inordinate measure of wealth to accrue by marriage to a man of Colonel Avalon's income.

It was admitted that, by marrying Foxe Avalon, Marie added greatly to her social importance. A man of good professional status, who held the lucrative post of *Custos* of the Quebec garrison, and had acted as private secretary to two successive governors of Canada, Colonel Avalon, C.B., was a personage whose wife, even if she had sprung from an inferior grade of colonial society, would have taken rank with the first gentlewomen of the capital. And Mrs. Avalon was in every respect qualified to occupy the position which her marriage conferred upon her. The Fairmead—a house which the Colonel selected for his bride's home in a suburb less populous with villas forty years since than it is now-a-days—became a favourite

resort for all the best society of the city ; and Colonel Avalon encouraged his wife to spare no reasonable expense in developing the natural beauties of her grounds, and in rendering her residence attractive to its numerous guests.

Foxe Avalon must have founded on his marriage exorbitant hopes of domestic happiness, if he was disappointed by the experiences of his first three years of matrimonial life. In temper and tastes he and his wife were thoroughly congenial ; and ere they had been married two years, a little girl appeared on the scene to heighten their felicity with the pride and continual excitements of parental satisfaction.

Rather more than a year after Felicia's birth, her brother came into the world—an event that preceded by only a brief while a gloomy change in the life at the Fairmead. Almost before the little boy manifested the first signs of constitutional infirmity, Marie Avalon entered the earlier stages of the lingering malady to which she succumbed, after three years of acute suffering ; and scarcely had she been placed beneath the pavement of the Catholic Cathedral when

the doctors declared to the despondent widower their *fear* that little Felix would soon follow his mother to another world—their *certainty* that, if the child were rescued from the immediately-impending perils, he could only arrive at man's estate by a childhood passed in bodily affliction, and by a youth of painful debility.

To ordinary observers the sorrows of his home appeared to have no extraordinary effect on Foxe Avalon's spirits and social arrangements. Instead of relinquishing the establishment in which he had consumed a brief period of exceptional happiness, he continued to reside at the Fairmead, where he received his friends with an undiminished hospitality, and expended on his beautiful gardens the same amount of care that they had received during his wife's life. It was remarked that he found especial enjoyment in carrying out the plans which she had formed for the further embellishment of the grounds; and that he allowed nothing to be put out of sight which was calculated to remind him of his bereavement. Perhaps he accepted invitations with an alacrity significant of a widower's readiness to find di-

version outside the walls of a desolate home. He became a more regular attendant at his whist-clubs, a more frequent diner at the various mess-tables of the garrison; but wherever he went, he was remarkable for the same courteous cheerfulness and gracious serenity which had distinguished him before the second grand sorrow of his existence. But those erred greatly who inferred from the composure and cheerfulness of his demeanour that his griefs had fallen upon a nature deficient in sensibility and affectionateness. The anguish, that makes no display and finds no utterance, is sometimes far keener and more enduring than the woe that finds relief in words and wins commiseration by looks of dejection. It was so with Foxe Avalon, the sunshine of whose smiling countenance played over a perpetually clouded heart.

Even Felicia, who in the course of years learnt to appreciate the fortitude and unselfishness of her father's nature, never imagined the poignancy of the emotions which his recollections of her mother roused in his breast

during his declining age ; and fortunately for her peace of mind and love of him, it never occurred to her to suspect that his paternal tenderness for her afflicted brother was basely qualified with an alloy of wounded vanity that was strangely out of harmony with the finer forces of his generous disposition.

Before his marriage Foxe Avalon had passionately desired to have a son who should transmit to another generation the physical strength and bodily grandeur that had been hereditary in his family for centuries, and who should play a brilliant part in the profession of arms. To have a big, stately, handsome soldier for his son was Foxe Avalon's chief desire. There was an egotistic meanness in the ardent longing ; and when instead of a vigorous, well-shaped boy, the son came in the form of a feeble, nervous, ricketty, strumous child, the father's parental disappointment comprised a sense of personal humiliation in having given life to so defective a creature. Had Foxe Avalon been a man of violent passions and sordid nature this morbid shame

for his son's infirmities would have revealed itself in alternate neglect of, and harshness towards, the little fellow. But it was far from the Colonel to harbour resentment against the innocent cause of his chagrin ; and to the last Felix never detected what was reprehensible, if not unnatural, in the feelings with which he was regarded by his sire.

As for Felicia, it never occurred to her to regard her brother's debility with a disdainful compassion or selfish sensitiveness. Her pity for him contained no alloy of the sentiment which would have caused her to think his affliction discreditable to herself. No girl was ever more proud of a sturdy, vigorous, overbearing brother than Felicia was of the fragile, pallid, weakly Felix, who, during his earlier years, resembled her in nothing save his profile, the colour of his hair, and the expression of his large, dark eyes. In her estimation he was a boy of incomparable cleverness and goodness ; and the assiduity with which she devoted herself to his service was scarcely more pathetic than amusing to those who studied her demeanour

to the invalid. And Foxe Avalon's children were objects of interest to nearly every resident in Quebec. The rural "habitans," whose farms supplied the markets of Quebec with fruit and poultry, and whose business caused them to pass frequently along the St. Foy road, were wont to look out for the boy and girl on approaching the Fairmead elms; and many an honest housewife, whose personal intercourse with the Avalons was confined to the exchange of way-side greetings, effected as she passed to and fro betwixt her farm and the city on market-days, never put up a prayer in French patois to the great Father of little children without making special mention of Marie Messurier's offspring.

The same affectionate care was felt and displayed for the brother and sister by the denizens of the city. When Felix was in his fifth year, and under medical orders to spend as much time as possible in the open air, without relinquishing the recumbent position necessitated by his spinal malady, Foxe Avalon provided for the boy's convenience a couch-phaeton, a

vehicle so fashioned that, whilst Felix lay at full length on its spring-bed, his sister could sit by his side. The animal that drew this trap was a stout brown pony, which Felicia drove under the guardianship of the Colonel's coachman, who used to walk by the side of the equipage, holding in his hand a leading-rein that was attached to the pony's bit. Everyone who knew Quebec was familiar with this carriage and its occupants,—the slim, stately, large-eyed girl who sat erect whilst she divided her attention between her animal and her brother; and the shadowy, eager-visaged little boy who lay upon his back, and never failed to look up for his sister's smile whenever anything occurred to please him. In the narrow, precipitous streets of the Upper Town, and in the still closer and more hilly thoroughfares of the Lower Town, people promptly bestirred themselves to make way for this commodious phaeton, which enjoyed in the public streets of Quebec just the same privileges that are accorded to royal carriages in grander capitals. It was free to move on the right hand or the left, to break or follow the line, accord-

ing to its pleasure; and wherever it went about the city of steep and tortuous routes, the children were saluted cordially by persons of every condition,—alike by the fruit-sellers of the markets and the sailors of the quays, by tradesmen standing at the doors of their shops, and gentle-folk entitled to call Colonel Avalon their personal friend.

This phaeton had been a familiar feature of the street-life of Quebec for something less than three years when Felicia, fast approaching the completion of her ninth year, held with her father a conversation that demonstrated the conscientious sense of responsibility with which the child, even at that early age, ministered to her brother.

“What are you so thoughtful about, little woman?” inquired Colonel Avalon, who was sitting after a solitary dinner over his walnuts and wine, whilst Felicia occupied a low chair near a bright log-fire.

When Colonel Avalon dined alone, his daughter was wont to appear in the dining-room after

the removal of the cheese, and give him her company during his dessert.

“I was thinking of Felix.”

“Indeed; what of him?”

“He is not quite so well. The pain in his knee would not let him sleep last night; and, though he is a brave boy, I caught him crying this afternoon because the pain troubled him so. I hope Dr. Renouf will come to-morrow.”

“He shall come. I'll write to him, since you wish it,” returned the Colonel, who always treated his daughter as far as possible with the respectfulness due to a girl twice her age.

“Thank you. To see Dr. Renouf will anyhow make me easy,” Miss Avalon replied, with comical stateliness. After a pause, she added, with a sigh, “It will be a long, long time, papa, before Felix is quite strong. Sometimes, do you know, I have a fear that he will not ever be quite strong, even when he is a man.”

“Sometimes, my pet,” the Colonel answered, sadly and tenderly, “I fear that he will never live to be a man.”

“Oh, don't fear that,” the girl rejoined quick-

ly, in a voice that was more expressive of confidence than alarm. She paused for a few moments before she added, with characteristic gentleness and an almost unnatural decisiveness, "He will live to be a man. He won't die before he is a man."

"May you be right!"

"I shall take care of him."

"You're a weakling, Fay," mildly objected the father, calling his girl by the pet name which she had acquired somehow or other, though no one knew the origin of the fanciful diminutive, "to accomplish what, I am afraid, the Almighty won't think right to do for us."

"But God has promised me that I shall take care of him," responded Fay, with a sudden increase of earnestness, turning her face upwards to her father, and away from the glowing fire, so that, whilst one side of her countenance was in deep shade, the other appeared to her companion to be clothed with a mysterious glory. "It's now ever so long, papa, since mamma's picture—the one in the drawing-room, not the other picture of her—looked at me so

sadly and sweetly that I, all in a quickness, felt how sad a thing it was that she could not come back to us from heaven and take care of Felix. Perhaps, you know, if she had lived, he would not have lost his strength and gone lame. The look of the picture must have taught me so, besides showing me that mamma wished me to have Felix for a *charge* as well as a *brother*. And ever since the evening when mamma told me to be the nurse of her motherless Felix—I mean ever since the look of the picture told me so—you know what I mean, dear—I have known that God will make me strong enough to take care of Felix."

All which statement of the circumstances and terms of her commission to be her brother's guardian-angel was made with such earnestness and unqualified simplicity, and penetrated Foxe Avalon's heart with such pathetic force, that he was in no humour to gainsay his daughter's representations, or question the grounds of her comfortable confidence in her ability to make a man of Felix. Indeed, for the moment, the Colonel was so profoundly stirred and alto-

gether thrown aback by Fay's confidential revelation, that he had no command of speech, nor of those feelings of which speech is the incompetent servant. Much to the child's surprise, he rose quickly from his chair, and, after hastily smoothing her bright tresses with a gentle movement of his right hand, retired abruptly, and without another word, to his study, whence he emerged, after an hour's interval, in possession of his usual equanimity, on the announcement that his coffee and daughter awaited him in the drawing-room.

Having sipped his two cups of strong black Mocha with his customary deliberateness, Foxe Avalon would fain have imparted, that evening, an extraordinary tenderness to the caress with which he dismissed Fay for nightly rest. But it was beyond the gracious gentleman's power to perform an act of endearment more eloquent of paternal fondness and reverence than his customary mode of bidding adieu to the girl for the night.

CHAPTER VII.

FELICIA AVALON'S UNWOMANLY ACCOMPLISHMENTS.

IT will be well for the reader to bear in mind the conversation reported in the last chapter; for the explanation of what may appear abnormal in Felicia Avalon's character, and irreconcilable with her temperament and circumstances, must be sought in the sincerity with which she believed herself commissioned to be the helpmate of her brother, and in the earnestness with which she determined, at the threshold of plastic girlhood, to accomplish the appointed work.

That a lady of fine nature and noble capabilities should outlive the fervour of girlhood, and reach mature years, without entertaining even the vaguest wish to taste the felicity of

love and marriage, is sometimes no matter for astonishment. The experience of most persons will furnish instances of single women who, in the absence of circumstances favourable to the development of the affections that dispose the gentler sex to cherish romantic passion, have passed from youth to age without experiencing a single emotion more fervid than the impulses of friendship or filial enthusiasm. But it is rare for a girl of abundant sensibility and a joyous temperament to spend the opening years of womanhood, surrounded by demonstrative admirers of the sterner sex, without entertaining a decided preference for some one qualified to become her husband. Yet this was Felicia Avalon's case. That she suffered under no constitutional disinclination for the society of men, was proved by the cordiality that she displayed to them, so long as their attentions indicated no desire for an intimacy with her exceeding the limits of a hearty and unembarrassing friendship. That she had entered her twenty-seventh year unmarried, and under no engagement to marry, was certainly not

attributable to an absence of suitors for her hand. Though she had never incurred an evil reputation for trifling with the feelings of her pursuers, and, before her introduction to Major Tilbury, had never wittingly exposed herself to a suspicion of coquetry, it was known that no girl of Quebec had received a larger number of eligible offers. Sir Peter Carteret's age and pompous manner accounted satisfactorily for her unwillingness to exchange her maidenly freedom for the rank and wealth which would pertain to the wife of so opulent a baronet. But she had declined offers from men so desirable in age, culture, position, and personal attractiveness, that her conduct in rejecting them was deemed explicable only on the supposition that she either guarded a secret passion for an unknown lover, or was perversely bent on dying an old maid.

Had the world known as much as the reader learnt from the last chapter, it would have spared itself much of the trouble which it took in vainly endeavouring to account for a course of action that had seriously diminished in two

or three quarters the almost universal popularity which Felicia Avalon enjoyed in Quebec society before her father's death. The secret of her perplexing behaviour lay in the belief and the devotion which gave rise to her peculiar relations with her only brother. Not that she had ever made any vow of perpetual virginity for his benefit. Not that she had declined her several suitors on deliberate consideration of his title to her undivided and life-long care, or in any way out of respect for her sentimental obligations to the brother who had long survived the condition of incapacity from which she undertook in tender childhood to do her utmost to raise him.

All that readers are asked to believe is, that the mission and labour of the child had so affected the nature and moulded the character of Felicia Avalon that she arrived at maturity, and passed the earlier years of adult life, innocent of the sentimental susceptibilities and the disposition for a particular kind of love that are usually operative in unsophisticated girls and right-minded women. The mission gave

to her intellect and heart a direction which they maintained long after the decided improvement of her brother's health might have been regarded as the fulfilment of her undertaking. The devotion, which characterized her performance of the voluntary duty, withdrew her life from the reach of certain general influences, and, without inspiring her with unfeminine hardness, or even narrowing her sympathies, guarded her from the forces that, under other circumstances, would have rendered her a wife and mother before the completion of her twenty-first year.

To the same causes must be attributed Felicia Avalon's possession of certain masculine accomplishments, the discovery of which will doubtless lower her in the estimation of many readers, and cause her to be regarded as a very eccentric and insufferably strong-minded creature. Concerning the attainments, which are thus likely to subject her to grievous misapprehension, I would fain be silent, if silence were compatible with the purposes of this narrative. But the historical necessity is imperious, and all that I may do for the preservation of Felicia

Avalon's character for feminine propriety, is to satisfy her censors that, whilst possessing information which may strike them as scarcely more unusual than discreditable in a woman, she was by no means deficient in the lighter pursuits and graceful arts appropriate to her sex.

Of the merits of Miss Avalon's dancing enough has already been said, and those who were privileged to see her in the Castle Gardens are not likely to question that she was a perfect mistress of the most difficult of all feminine mysteries—the arts of dress and deportment. But the taste and knowledge, which enable a woman to make the most of her bodily grace, were by no means the most important results of the care lavished on Colonel Avalon's daughter by governesses and professors. Severe musical critics concurred in allowing that, whilst lacking the finish and delicacy of a perfect artiste, she was a pianist of cleverness and poetic feeling, whose execution, notwithstanding its faultiness, possessed merits to which the mere mechanical performer can never

attain. Of her vocal ability the judges spoke with much greater warmth; and, besides commanding the thoroughness with which she had carried out the instructions of several competent teachers of singing, they were pleased to regard as a choice musical curiosity the unusually comprehensive organ which enabled Miss Avalon to perform with equal ease male and female parts at the re-unions of the Quebec Madrigal Association. Nor was the lady without title to rank amongst painters as an aspirant considerably superior to the better sort of amateurs. When Leonard Donkin, of the "Old Water Colour," returned to London from his Canadian trip, he occasioned Mrs. Donkin no little uneasiness by the extravagant enthusiasm with which he spoke of the artistic genius of Miss Avalon of Quebec; and Leonard's brethren of the studios were disposed to ridicule his representations as rhapsodies, occasioned by the fair Canadian's personal fascinations, rather than by her pictorial skill, until he exhibited, in support of his assertions, half-a-dozen sketches in water-colours—bits of Canadian

autumn-tint and some studies of waterfalls—which quickly caused them to substitute cordial eulogy for flippant badinage, and to admit unanimously that Leonard's transatlantic she-painter was a bold delineator and superb colourist.

And now for the revelations which will shock the fastidious, and incite them to predict evil things of Miss Avalon of the Fairmead. She knew Latin; she knew Greek; she knew Mathematics—not very much of them, perhaps, but something more than an average hack classical and mathematical tutor could conscientiously undertake to teach a clever pupil. Her knowledge in each of these departments of study was limited, but it certainly was not chargeable with being "only a smattering." What she knew of Latin, Greek, and Mathematics, she knew precisely and thoroughly, and could use with equal promptitude and exactness. She could play with the first six books of Euclid as though its propositions were mere tricks and puzzles for the diversion of a gentlewoman's idle hours. The Civil Service examiners—who, I am assured

by a youthful member of my family, are the most terrible of all examiners—would have found it beyond their power to bring her to grief in quadratic equations. It may be that her knowledge of Greek literature was superficial and fragmentary; but she had done honest work in the soil of Homer and Euripides, and might have competed with any Harrovian of the period in accurate knowledge of the irregularities of Greek verbs. Though she never quoted Horace, she knew him well, and could have recited aloud several of the poet's choicest odes without making a false quantity.

Having stated thus fully the nature of Miss Avalon's unfeminine propensities and achievements, it is right that I should tell with equal candour how she came to contract such masculine tastes, and be guilty of such abominable outrages on social decorum. Grievous culprits are sometimes found to have committed their offences under circumstances that entitle them to compassion, and palliate the enormity of their crimes. And it may be that, on hearing all the facts of the case, charitable readers

will be of opinion that Felicia Avalon may be pardoned for knowing rather more Greek than her brother.

Felix Avalon had entered upon his thirteenth year, and acquired so much stability in his spinal bones that he could make calls in St. Lewis Street without the help of the couch-phaeton, which stood dusty and disused in the backward part of Colonel Avalon's big coach-house, when Felicia—*æt. 14*, and looking at least two years older—informed her papa that, her brother's health having so vastly improved, it was incumbent on them to push forward his mental education.

“He must be educated like other men,” observed the sensible girl, whose influence with her sire increased in proportion as Foxe Avalon's hair became whiter, “since on growing up he will be much like other men in body.”

“He'll never be so strong as other men, Fay,” urged the Colonel.

“He'll always be something weaker in muscle than ordinary men, but he won't be a cripple and an object, dear boy, as we once feared he might.”

“Thank God for that! But what he’ll be good for when he has grown to be a man is more than I can predict.”

“My brother,” Fay insisted proudly, “will be good for a great many things. He may be a lawyer, or a merchant like Sir Peter Carteret, or a divine as honoured and beloved as ever Bishop Mountain was.”

“Ah!” assented the Colonel, breaking another egg, for this conversation took place at the breakfast-table, “I should not object to seeing the boy a bishop; but I am too old a man to see him grow to be anyone of importance. It is certain that he will never be able to follow my profession. Ah! Fay, I wish you had been a boy and he a girl—then I should have a soldier for my son.”

“In which case you might live, papa, to be without a son at all. But about Felix’s education?”

“He can’t go to the Grammar School, child. A blow with a cricket-ball, or a sharp run at *la crosse*, would kill him.”

“Go to school! Of course not!” assented

Fay sadly. "Felix will grow stronger, and learn to dance like other men; but he may not be exposed to too great trials."

"Poor lad! he must grow up a milksop!"

"You shouldn't say so, papa. Felix has nothing of the milksop in him. All these years that he has suffered he has been as true a hero as ever English boy was. Dr. Renouf told you the other day that he never knew such a boy for enduring pain without even flinching."

"No doubt—the Avalons were never cowards. But the boy can't go to school; and yet, now that your governess has taught him reading, writing, and arithmetic, after a fashion, he must learn things which of course she is unable to teach him."

"Exactly so; and, since he can't go to the teacher, the teacher must come to him."

"I must have a tutor in the house?"

"Not in the house. The gentleman, whom Dr. Renouf knows and recommends, would rather live in the town, where he has a good many pupils, and visit us every day."

Smiling with an amusement that was not

without a qualification of surprise, Colonel Avalon exclaimed,

“By Jove, Miss Fay, you’ve settled it all! You’ve talked the matter over with Renouf before mentioning it to me? You’ve engaged the tutor?”

“No, dear, not engaged him—only found him out for your approval. I was sure that you would like me to have a plan before I troubled you about Felix’s education. You have always preferred that I should arrange everything for him.”

“Who’s the tutor?”

“Mr. Willis—an Englishman and a capital scholar. He is a Master of Arts of Oxford, who has settled in Canada for the sake of his health, which requires a bracing atmosphere. Dr. Renouf says that Mr. Willis took high honours at Oxford.”

“Of course, then,” inquired Foxe Avalon, “he speaks English with purity?”

“Doubtless.”

“I would not have my son taught by a fellow with a Yankee twang and a nasal squeak,”

insisted the Colonel, who, in spite of his affection for Canada, had never reconciled himself to the peculiarities of Canadian-English, and in his desire that his children should speak their mother-tongue with perfect purity, never allowed a servant to enter his house who had the slightest taint of Americanism in his dialect or tone.

In the higher grades of society, at Quebec or Montreal, it is still possible to find whole families whose voices and language are altogether free from Transatlantic corruption, though it must be admitted that such families are less numerous than they were thirty years since, and that, in proportion as English influence has grown weaker amongst the superior colonists in matters of taste, the objectionable intonation and verbal peculiarities of Yankee speech have become more prevalent in the drawing-rooms of both cities. Colonel Avalon had, however, exerted himself so successfully to preserve his children from what he stigmatized, with excessive disgust to an extremely confidential friend, as a barbarous and insufferably

vulgar dialect, that their colonial birth and breeding would not have been detected in the politest circles of London society by their manner of expressing themselves.

“Dr. Renouf would have been sure to say if Mr. Willis could not be trusted in that particular,” urged Fay.

“Of course. Renouf dislikes vile, poisoned English as much as I do. Did he tell you how much Mr. Willis would expect me to pay him?”

“Certainly not, papa. That’s a matter about which I should not presume to trouble my head.”

“The boy will learn slowly without the emulation of companionship.”

“I shall be his companion.”

“You!” ejaculated Foxe Avalon, opening his eyes with astonishment at the young lady, who had occasioned her father not a few surprises during the brief period of her existence.

“Yes, I mean to learn Latin. Miss Marchmont says Latin is a very proper study for a girl, and that I had better begin it at once.”

Miss Marchmont, a lady for whom Colonel

Avalon cherished cordial respect, was Fay Avalon's governess, and would have been present at this interesting discussion, had she not been suddenly called away on the previous day to visit a sick sister at Montreal.

"If Miss Marchmont says so, I suppose it won't hurt you to learn Latin; but don't talk to everybody about it, for I don't wish the world to regard you as an intellectual phenomenon."

"And I mean to learn Greek," continued the barely fourteen-year-old Felicia Avalon, enunciating all the particulars of her fully matured plans.

"If you do, child," her father exclaimed in a voice of consternation, "you'll frighten all the men away from you."

"I don't want them to come near me. And I mean to learn Euclid and Algebra."

"You'll die an old maid," roared the Colonel, somewhat disposed to scold, but more strongly inclined to laugh.

"You see, papa," argued the young lady, taking no notice of the menace of his last ejaculation, "it will do Felix a great deal of good to

have a companion in his studies. We shall work together; and when his weakness disposes him to indolence, I shall spur him on. So Mr. Willis will have a class of two—a good, docile boy, and a naughty, rebellious girl."

The excellence of the girl's plan for her brother's training being obvious, Colonel Avalon adopted it; and forthwith Mr. Frederick Willis, M.A., of Queen's College, Oxford, was retained as visiting-tutor at the Fairmead, to lure the children onwards over the thorny ways and arduous steeps of academic learning.

And with the perseverance and resoluteness which distinguished her from ordinary girls, Fay Avalon learnt Latin and Greek, Euclid and Algebra, with her brother, keeping pace with him in each of those studies from the day when Mr. Willis led him over the threshold of the Latin accidence, to the time when the Bishop of Quebec, after ascertaining with surprise the soundness of his acquirements, ordained the young literate a deacon of the Church of England.

Yet further, in palliation of Miss Avalon's

offences against the feminine proprieties, let it be remarked that, though she had acquired, with much more than an average graduate's accuracy, rather more than an ordinary honourless Oxford or Cambridge M.A.'s knowledge of classics and mathematics, she never made a show of her reprehensible attainments. On the contrary, when Albert Renouf, Dr. Renouf's eldest son, intending to exalt her in the world's estimation, made a grand talk about her marvellous cleverness and astounding knowledge of dead literatures, the young lady, on hearing of her champion's indiscretion, bade him, under pain of her perpetual detestation, hold his peace for all future time concerning her unnatural erudition. Of course it was generally understood by Miss Avalon's female acquaintances that she was a fearfully learned person, and was equally qualified to enlighten the commandant of the garrison on questions of fortification, and to argue with the bishop on the mysteries of the Greek tongue; but, in consideration of her richness in feminine accomplishments, they forgave her for being so criminally

superior to themselves. The girl who danced so well, painted so cleverly, sung so exquisitely, and played a part of universal affability in her native city, was not severely judged for possessing a store of unfeminine knowledge, which she had the good taste to keep to herself and her brother.

CHAPTER VIII.

A TOPOGRAPHICAL PARALLEL.

THE luxurious slave, with a soul disposed to sicken o'er the heaving wave, the vain lord of wantonness and ease suffering from an incapacity to derive enjoyment from pleasure, or any other English gentleman of weak nerves and strong appetite for novelty, who would fain realize some of the excitements of a brief residence in Quebec during the hot season, and yet shrinks from the bare thought of trying to dance in triumph over stormy waters for ten consecutive days and nights, may do something for the attainment of his object by passing a fortnight in Guernsey during July or August. Let him run from London to Southampton or Weymouth in a first-class railway-carriage, and

consent to endure the discomfort of a few hours' passage over a not invariably turbulent sea, let him throw himself on the hospitality of Gardiner's Government House Hotel, and, by the aid of such introductions as even despicably bad sailors can sometimes procure, make the acquaintance of the native aristocracy of St. Peter's Port and its environs, and he will be in a position to form a not altogether inadequate notion of some of the pleasant experiences in store for the bolder traveller from the mother country, who, at the same season of the year, and with similar recommendations to denizens of the Canadian city, takes up his abode at Payne's Hotel in the Place d'Armes, or the Albion Hotel in Palace Street.

Not that the diminutive island possesses all the grander attractions and nobler beauties which rouse the enthusiasm of the artist who for the first time visits Quebec, and gazes with an awful delight on its surrounding scenery. The land of primæval forests and far-resounding cataracts is rich in marvels, the like of which no tourist may look for in an island

whose only waterfalls are rippling rills that glide almost imperceptibly between grassy borders, and whose farmers allow no timber to cover ground that can be used profitably for the sustenance of their valuable breed of cattle. Nor is it suggested that St. Peter's Port is comparable with Quebec in respect to magnitude, populousness, or picturesque impressiveness. The hill from whose summit the guns of Fort George command every approach by which the most skilful pilot could hope to bring a hostile ship through the hidden rocks of an appallingly dangerous coast into the harbour of the insular capital, is a modest, though never insignificant, elevation, when it is contrasted with the glittering vastness of Cape Diamond; and the aspects of the two places are not without the architectural differences that must under any circumstances distinguish the city of a populous and far-extending territory from the marine town of a small and isolated community.

And yet the points of external resemblance are so numerous and striking that no worthy son of Quebec is likely to rest his eyes on the

houses of St. Peter's Port, rising in successive stages from the water's edge to the summit of a commanding eminence, without thinking of his native city with fresh impulses of patriotic pride and fondness. By the cheerful brightness and briskness of the quay, he is reminded of the port and "Lower Town," where, in his boyhood, he watched the skill and listened to the animating cries of Canadian sailors, or studied the keen faces of merchants hastening from the humming 'Change to their contiguous warehouses. The show of substantial and picturesque habitations covering the hill almost deludes him for the moment into thinking that he surveys a piece of the Canadian "Upper Town," at one of the points where its military works are least conspicuous. The steamer, on which he slowly glides towards a noble harbour, moves indeed upon the ocean, but over a plain to which the barriers of closely adjacent islands and the lines of remoter coasts have denied the appearance of immeasurable wideness that characterizes the open sea in a degree that accords with its proverbial reputation for boundlessness.

Narrowed into a frith, less expansive than many of the smaller Canadian lakes, the sea that plashes against the marge of Guernsey on the one side, and laves the rocks of Herm and Jeddho on the other, is not insulted by the writer who urges that it is more calculated to strengthen than dispel the illusion which disposes the tourist to mistake it, during one of its calmer periods, for the fluctuating and swollen surface of the mighty St. Lawrence.

A closer inspection of the insular town ascertains that its similarity to Quebec extends to social conditions, and is even more noticeable in its internal arrangements and rural suburbs than in the more prominent features of its marine aspect. Just as the people of the Canadian capital delight in making aquatic excursions for business or pleasure to the various islands that glitter in the tide, and to the numerous townships that nestle in the coves of the St. Lawrence, the denizens of the European town are continually running by steamer or yacht to the other sea-encircled settlements of the Chan-

nel, or the nearer ports of the French coast. The intelligence, the vigour, and the amiable authoritativeness of the important personages of the island correspond precisely to the shrewdness, energy, and wholesome self-sufficiency of the colonial 'dignitaries. Pride of family declares itself in the colony just as quaintly and agreeably as in the self-governing dependency that holds its parliament under the guns of Fort George. Our American tourist from Quebec, on climbing the narrow streets of St. Peter's Port, is reminded of his native city by the irregularity and precipitousness of the ways, the French names upon the shopfronts, the Gallic babble of the populace gossiping in a *patois* that proclaims their French origin,—an origin which is still further evidenced, in the case of the humbler folk in town for the market, by peculiarities of costume.

A Guernseyan loiterer in the old market-place of Quebec, amidst French-speaking higglers of both sexes, may in July readily imagine himself listening to the cries and chaffering of the French-speaking dealers of the equal-

ly picturesque market of St. Peter's Port. The suburbs and immediate environs of the Canadian capital are no less calculated to entertain him with agreeable illusions. He sees, indeed, forests and waterfalls that tell him he is in a foreign land ; but ever and again he comes upon a lake or a river-creek which he may be pardoned for mistaking for a glimpse of one of the many lake-like bays with which the storms of countless seasons have indented and beautified the sea-board of his native island. The farms of the French *habitans* are somewhat larger, no doubt, than the farms of his familiar neighbours, the Guernseyau agriculturalists ; but the homesteads of the former have the same picturesque-ness, tone, music, that distinguish dwellings of the latter from the English farm-house. Nor is he less forcibly reminded of his home by those quarters of the city, and those circles of colonial society, where English influence is paramount. Sauntering under the trees which border the lanes of the suburban quarter, of which the Chemin de la Grande Allée and the St. Foy Road are the chief arteries—the suburb in which the

Quebeckians of wealth and fashion have their garden-girt villas and emparked mansions—he fancies himself back again on the outskirts of the ornamental grounds of St. Martin's, and peering about the picturesque cottages of the Rohais Road. And thus, surrendering himself to the influences of a scene which has nothing to remind him of the perilous severity of the Canadian winter, he realizes the fact that, so long as the brief summer of their country endures, the ladies of Quebec are not less largely favoured than the "Lilies of Guernsey" with a genial atmosphere and the luxurious delights which horticulture dispenses even in lands where Nature declines to smile until she has been wooed with the homage of labour.

CHAPTER IX.

FELICIA AVALON ASTONISHES HER BROTHER.

EVEN at the present time, when so much has been done for the extension and improvement of this choicest suburb of Quebec, the St. Foy Road, which is the most picturesque of its highways, contains few residences superior to the Fairmead. Built substantially of the hard stone of the neighbouring rocks, and furnished with every appliance for mitigating the rigours of the Canadian climate, it is seen to best advantage when the foliage of its well-grown trees, and the parterres of its undulating gardens, surround it with the appropriate embellishments of a model summer residence.

An ample hall, bright with masses of gorgeous blossoms during the season of flowers, and

luxuriously heated with a large stove during the months of incessant snow and frost. Opening into the hall, a drawing-room large enough for a party of seventy dancers, a library which Foxe Avalon furnished with some three thousand judiciously-chosen volumes, a breakfast-parlour for many a day designated Miss Avalon's parlour, and the dining-room, in which the Colonel used to entertain four-and-twenty guests at his state dinners. Good kitchens in the rear, and ample cellars beneath them. A lofty and excellently-furnished billiard-room, erected at the back of the mansion. Immediately over the apartments of the ground-floor half a dozen capacious bed-rooms. Above them, the battlemented tower, whither Marie Messurier's husband used to conduct his friends for a cigar in his sufficiently commodious smoking-room, and for a superb view of the Charles Valley, the Bonhomme and Tsoumonthowan mountains, and the St. Lawrence. A snug stable and big coach-house. A flower-garden, comprising more than an acre, and an ornamental paddock, containing some four acres of pasture,

with his belt of carefully cultivated timber.

These were the principal features of the modest demesne which Felix and Fay Avalon continued to make their home for several years after their father's death. It was nothing more than just such a good suburban villa as the prosperous London merchant delights to call his little place at Putney. They were also the arrangements of the place, of which Felicia Avalon may be said to have become the mistress in her early childhood. For even in the days when a governess resided in the house for Fay's benefit, the girl was almost as much the queen of her father's residence as her mother could have been under any circumstances.

Out of respect to the feelings of a lady whom Marie held in affectionate regard, rather from consideration for his own comfort, Foxe Avalon had, on his wife's death, invited Miss Messurier to take up her abode beneath his roof, and assume the reins of domestic authority that had fallen from her niece's hands. But cautious Miss Messurier, foreseeing that such an arrangement might be more productive of embarrass-

inent than of family union, declined to accede to the Colonel's petition, though she readily promised to give him the benefit of her feminine sagacity and watchfulness in the education of his children. No teacher of accomplishments was ever engaged for Felicia, no female servant was ever taken into the Fairmead, until Miss Messurier had been consulted on the subject; and from the time when Fay first "came out" at one of the winter assemblies in the Place d'Armes, till the festal madness of "the Prince's season," Great-aunt Messurier had discharged with equal assiduity and kindness the functions of chaperon to Miss Avalon of the Fairmead. But though the aunt's influence had been steadily felt in the training of the niece, and in the internal affairs of Colonel Avalon's household, it never became a government that prevented the younger lady from thinking herself, or being thought, the mistress of her father's mansion. It was in the nature of things that this premature attainment and uninterrupted possession of a housewife's authority gave Felicia Avalon an air of self-

dependence seldom observable in a young single woman. On the other hand, it was in accordance with the unqualified amiability of her generous and strongly sympathetic temperament, that they failed to infuse her with arrogance, or impart to her manners the slightest indications of a dominating spirit.

In the breakfast-room of the Fairmead—a parlour that commanded even a finer view of the Charles Valley than the drawing-room—Felix Avalon and his sister were seated over a rather late breakfast, some ten days after the grand promenade in the Castle Gardens, when the conversation of the two took the following form, whilst the luxuriously warm air, laden with floral perfume, and coming through the open window from the rose-beds, increased the young clergyman's reluctance to break away from the agreeable influences of his sister's company, and hasten off to his parochial duties.

“Lady Morton’s party of last night was even better than her parties usually are,” Felix remarked, in flattering judgment of an assembly

which he and his sister had attended on the previous evening.

“So pleasant, that I was sorry to see it break up so early,” Fay assented, giving one of the results of an unusually extended observation of evening entertainments. “The pleasanter the party, the less likely is it to give one low spirits and *ennui* on the following day. I danced a good deal, but I am not at all tired this morning.”

“I saw you dancing with Mr. Patterson, the new attorney-general. How did you like him?”

“He is very amusing, but, like all able lawyers—inordinately loquacious. Barristers should be contented with their forensic privileges and refrain from excessive speech in private society. Mr. Patterson talks well, but unfortunately he never knows when he has said enough; and he has not acquired the conversationalist’s art of concealing the desire for admiration.”

“You danced with him three times.”

“He asked me three times, and I was disengaged. If I had not accepted him for a part-

ner, I should have been compelled to annoy Aunt Messurier by dancing yet oftener with Major Tilbury."

"She is afraid that the Major will make you an offer."

"Far worse. That would be a reasonable apprehension. Dear old aunt is afraid that I should accept him."

"I should be sorry to know there were grounds for that apprehension."

"Indeed,—then you sympathize with aunt's dislike of the man?"

"It is wrong of me to cherish an antagonism against a man of whom I know no evil, and who takes great pains to make himself agreeable to me."

"Perhaps you would find him more congenial to you if he appeared less anxious for your good opinion. As it is, you dislike him?"

"In strict confidence, Fay," the incumbent of St. Anne's remarked, with a seriousness that was not the less impressive because it was slightly qualified with comical exaggeration, "I never approach him without experiencing a

sensation of nervous repulsion and indefinable abhorrence. One reads in novels of men who have detected their disguised enemies by a mysterious unaccountable instinct of hatred; and if Major Tilbury were to work me a fatal wrong, and show himself the resolute foe of my happiness, he would at the same time justify my culpable repugnance to him and demonstrate the naturalness of the fictitious delineations. I am told that he is an honourable gentleman, but in the total absence of any facts to justify my uncharitable suspicions, I cannot do otherwise than believe he is not a true man."

" You shan't have him for a brother-in-law; make yourself quite easy on that score."

" No such fear ever disturbed me."

" Indeed? He has shown me abundance of attention?" Felicia remarked interrogatively, whilst she experienced satisfaction on learning that the courtesies, which she knew herself to have lavished on the officer of artillery, had not attracted her brother's attention, or at least had occasioned him no uneasiness.

Since her brother had been so unobservant of

her flirtation with Major Tilbury, she might presume that the world had been no less inattentive to an affair of which she was already ashamed.

“I shall know that you have lost your heart,” laughed Felix, “long before you tell the name of the man who has won it. At present you are heart-whole; and my nervous system will not fail to announce it to me when you have ceased to be so. If you were to admire Mr. Patterson as much as he obviously admires you, the time might come quickly when I should have to look out for another home, or a less congenial house-keeper.”

If Felix, on making this speech, regarded his sister’s handsome face with a fear that his words would call a treacherous blush to its olive complexion, he was relieved by the manner in which she said,

“You’ll never see me the wife of a smart chatterbox.”

“By-the-by,” observed Felix, abruptly leading the talk to another subject, as he mentally prepared himself for his daily excursion into

town, “Mr. Quex stopped me yesterday as I passed his shop-door, and asked what you thought of ‘Sketches of High Life in a British-American Colony.’ Our bookseller seems to entertain a flattering opinion of your critical opinion ; and when I told him that you had not even looked into the story yet, he could scarcely believe me.”

“Everybody appears to be reading that book. I suppose I must make an effort to master its contents and go with the fashion in literature as well as in other things.”

“The story is making a prodigious sensation. It has not been published thirteen months, and yet it has had an enormous sale.”

“A year is a long time for the popularity of a novel.”

“The London critics are of one mind about the freshness and artistic excellence of the pictures of colonial society ; and the *Times* calls it a story that no living novelist need blush to call one of his masterpieces. Its circulation in the United States is to be counted by thousands, and Quex tells me that last week he sold over

his counter in Market Place three hundred and twenty copies of the New York edition. With the solitary exception of yourself, every reasonable person in Quebec has read, or is reading it."

"Don't say any more about the critics, Felix; their unanimity is, to say the least, very suspicious. And as for the sale and the popularity of a story, paltry authors may make a great deal of money now-a-days, and contemptible works find hundreds of thousands of readers. If you wish me to read the book without further delay, assure me of its merits."

Whereupon Felix, having finished his breakfast, rose from his seat, paced four or five times along one side of the parlour with quick, nervous steps, and then, facing round, delivered quite a fervid oration on the merits of the book which, whilst all the world of Quebec was discussing it excitedly, his sister had manifested a perplexing disinclination to peruse. Perhaps the young clergyman was all the more emphatic in his eulogies of the work because he was piqued by Fay's neglect of a performance which he had

taken under his protection, and was resolved on scolding her into reading.

“Marjory Gatkin; or Sketches of High Life in a British American Colony,” was not precisely a novel; or, if it must be classed with novels, it should be regarded as the first specimen of a new school of romantic fiction. Its second title was more appropriate than the first to the design of a work which, instead of being a continuous narrative, with the initiatory descriptions, plot, and *denouement* of an ordinary romance, was a series of separate portraiture of the leading personages in the best social set of a colonial capital. Each chapter might have been published alone as a distinct and complete delineation of character and manners. But the author had exercised wonderful cleverness in making each sketch contribute to the interest of those that followed it, and in producing a perfect and harmonious drama of domestic life in the series of papers. Though the anonymous author had adopted imaginary names for places as well as persons, the descriptions left no room to question that the colony of the narratives was Canada, that

the city was Quebec, that the characters were personages whom he had studied during a residence on the St. Lawrence. Marjory Gatkin, the heroine, was an altogether bewitching little creature, a truthful illustration of the finest qualities of a brave, simple, affectionate girl; and, whilst demonstrating the most extraordinary faculty for depicting varieties of human nature in bright, piquant, and elegant language, the author in the more pathetic and serious passages of an abundantly humorous achievement had proved himself to have the ability and will to make his readers stronger and braver, as well as lighter of heart. In short, Mr. Felix Avalon was ready to stake all the reputation which he enjoyed amongst his friends for sagacity on a decided opinion that "Marjory Gatkin" was the book of an author capable of incomparably excellent work in literary art.

During his delivery of which oration on the merits of an anonymous writer, the Rev. Felix Avalon was pleased to see in his sister's countenance certain evidences that she was affected by his words. Indeed, by the quick changes of

her heightened colour, and the tell-tale twitching of her expressive mouth, and the brightness of her glowing and joyful eyes, Miss Avalon exhibited a measure and vehemence of excitement so greatly disproportionate to the stimulus which was likely to result from the commendation of the unknown author, that, had Felix not been greatly carried away and blinded by his own fervour, he would not have failed to detect from Fay's looks the secret which she shortly revealed to him by a verbal confession.

“There, *now* you will behave like a sensible girl and read the book?” Felix asked triumphantly, feeling that his eloquence had achieved its object.

“After so forcible and minute a description of its contents, I should be wasting my time,” replied Fay Avalon, returning for a moment to her waywardness, and making one last attempt to maintain an affectation of indifference, and keep her own counsel.

“Upon my word, Fay,” exclaimed Felix, “you are more irritating and foolish than ever.”

“Why, you foolish boy, I wrote the book myself,” Fay cried aloud, as her heart beat tumultuously, and a crimson flush leaped to her face in the agitation of the crisis.

“What!—you wrote the book?”

“Yes—yes—yes! I did not mean to tell you. I meant to keep the secret even from you. And I should have kept it from you, if you had not broken me down, and gladdened me till you almost maddened me with your preposterous praises.”

Whereupon Felix, having thoroughly received his sister’s astounding communication, and realized all its significance, threw his arms round her neck and kissed her half a dozen times in as many seconds, and, covering her with scores of laudatory epithets, declared himself a preposterous blockhead for not having learnt from the internal evidence of “Marjory Gatkin” that no one but his inimitable sister could have been its author. All which hysterical impulsiveness and extravagant diction were of course very unseemly in the young clergyman, and must be accounted for by apologetic reference

to the constitutional excitability of the French Messuriers.

“Oh! darling, you are so unspeakably kind to me!” ejaculated Fay, with something like a sob, whilst tears of pure happiness ran from her brimming eyes to the hands that rested on her brother’s shoulder.

“Kind, you goose!” rejoined the brother.

“And you are not in the least angry with me?” inquired Fay, who had entertained a secret fear that Felix might disapprove of her literary venture, as a feat savouring of unfeminine confidence, and scarcely congruent with the dignity of the Avalons. For antiquated prejudices sometimes hold their ground amongst colonial grandes long after English society has discarded them; and, though Fay had no taint of snobbishness in her nature, and had been trained to hold literature and its professors in reverential regard, she was not quite sure that Miss Avalon of the Fairmead might not be thought to have compromised the Avalon gentility, and to have sinned against the social proprieties, in trying her hand at authorship.

"No; I forgive you for not letting me into your confidence sooner," said Felix, whose pride in his sister's achievement caused him to miss the force of her anxious inquiry.

"I mean," she explained, "that you don't think me wrong, or strong-minded, or—in fact, an offender against the social proprieties?"

Mr. Felix Avalon was of opinion that the proprieties had not been in any degree violated. The feminine proprieties were nothing more than laws resulting from the action of such gentlewomen as his sister; and whatsoever a lady of the finest natural quality was pleased to do could not be otherwise than seemly and fit. If the Gloucestershire Avalons were ever in past time such noodles as to cherish disdain for women who exercised for honourable ends their finest mental faculties, an excuse must be sought for them in the force of obsolete prejudices. If Fay's father were alive, he would be beside himself with joy at his daughter's literary success. But how had Fay conceived the notion of trying her hand at authorship? How had she carried her project into effect? Now

that she made her brother a companion of her secret, she must have no reserve in her confidence, but tell him everything.

In reply to which entreaty Fay Avalon, who had risen to her feet to receive her brother's embrace and tempestuous congratulations, placed a hand on each of his shoulders, and, treating him as though she were a child playing with a wheelbarrow, pushed him gently backwards across the room until he dropt into an easy-chair, beside which article of furniture lay a footstool that was one of Fay's favourite seats. And having lowered herself to this stool, so that she sat in child-like fashion at her brother's feet, she gratified his curiosity to the fullest possible extent.

It might be a prosaic and ignoble confession, but still it was the truth, that she had first determined to write a book in the hope that she could earn money with her pen. More than two years had passed since she and Felix, sitting in private council over their account-books, had found themselves compelled to acknowledge that their united income was insufficient to

maintain the Fairmead, and the style of living which they had been educated to think appropriate to their dignity. To curtail the expenses of the establishment would be difficult, if not impossible. The gardens could not be kept up with less than two gardeners. Their carriage was an absolute necessity. It would be extremely painful to institute retrenchments of expenditure that would put an end to the benevolent charities which the Fairmead had, for a quarter of a century, dispensed to the poor of the town. Fay would have deemed herself a dishonoured personage if she had been compelled to leave the Fairmead. She loved the old home no less than her brother loved it. Their happiness depended on its preservation. And yet the fact was obvious that their way of living was beyond the income accruing from their property and her brother's modest preferences. Indeed, his profession contributed nothing to their private means, since he very properly expended on charity to his poor, and on the maintenance of his schools, every coin that came to him from his church and chap-

lancy. Under these circumstances, she had resolved to write a book, and the object of her industry, prosecuted without her brother's knowledge, whilst he worked in his parish and at the gaol, had been attained. On completing "Marjory Gatkin" she sent it to the London publishers, Messrs. Hobson and Holliday. The story had been such a commercial success that Messrs. Hobson and Holliday had already paid her £200 on account of her share of half the profits arising from its sale. Yet more, she had written another story—a far better one than "Marjory Gatkin"—for which Messrs. Hobson and Holliday had sent her £500. Consequently she was a rich woman. Felix might make himself perfectly easy with respect to questions of domestic finance. Instead of being less than their needs, their income would exceed their expenditure. He might increase his munificence to the poor, and she, with a light conscience, might continue to be one of Madame Perronet's most lavish patrons. "I have a Frenchwoman's love of finery," Miss Avalon confessed naïvely, when she had completed her revelations, "and

it is such a relief to know that I may gratify it without sin."

"And do you mean to keep your secret any longer?" inquired Felix.

"Bless me, yes!" Felicia ejaculated sharply, as though the mere suggestion that she might throw aside the curtain of anonymity had scared her. "I would not for any consideration let the world know that I write books. As it is, I am too clever and knowing to be so thoroughly popular as I wish to be. Some of our friends already think me a monstrous prodigy of learning. Ever since Albert Renouf made such an absurd fuss about my Latin and Greek, and my knowledge of a few books of Euclid, the Wash-bournes and the Antrobuses have shown themselves afraid of me. Oh! Felix, dear," the young woman added passionately, "I don't want to be admired, but to be loved by everybody who is lovable."

"And who is there in Quebec, my glorious girl," answered Felix, smoothing her brown hair, as though he were a giant, and she an eight-years-old pet, "from the brother whom

you nursed throughout years of sickness, to the poorest wretch of my parish, who does not love you?"

"I think I am liked by a great many people," assented the woman, who, though she had never felt the glow of the fiercest kind of love, had dangerously active sympathies, and a morbid yearning for the good opinion of her neighbours.

"So, mind," she added, in an admonitory voice, after a few seconds' pause, "you may not betray me. To be safe, you must be on your guard, not to let it seem that you have even a notion who the anonymous author can be. And don't think, Felix, that, because I have written for money's sake, I mean to make a base and venal use of my pen."

"No fear of my thinking that."

"The writer's vocation will be congenial and in every respect salutary. Ere long I shall write in a way worthy of the praises which you have lavished on my first raw attempt. The mental effort of creating characters and suitable positions for them fills me with delight;

and whilst studying my own imaginary characters, I learn to appreciate the forces and failings of my own nature. My pen shall stimulate and fortify the virtues of my readers, whilst it affords them entertainment. I don't mean to be a mere scribbler, but a literary artist of high purpose. And I *know*," she concluded, shaking her white, soft hand, before she pointed with it to her forehead, "that I shall be a great writer! The literary power is in me. I feel it in my hand and my head and my heart."

To Felix Avalon's discredit it must be recorded that, in the excitement occasioned to him by his sister's revelations, he became so unobservant of the passage of time, that he continued to gossip with her long after the hour which should have seen him at the door of the St. Anne's school, where that discontented valetudinarian and croaker, Mr. Henderson, deemed himself badly treated in being constrained to perform the duties of his pedagogic office without the Rex. Felix Avalon's assistance. But fortunately the big Dutch clock, that had made remarks about the time for full thirty

years, in its corner of the entrance-hall of the Fairmead mansion, recalled Felix to a sense of his professional responsibilities, when it was still possible for him to reach Dauphine Street at his usual hour for visiting the Quebec penitentiary.

CHAPTER X.

THE MAJOR'S INTENTIONS.

ALTHOUGH Major Tilbury's acquaintances in the different military services concurred in applauding his manliness, it does not follow that he possessed more than an average share of the robuster virtues. To think a male person more than ordinarily courageous and rich in the distinctive qualities of his sex because his comrades are pleased to commend him for being a manly fellow, would be almost as absurd as to believe in a gentlewoman's amiability on the complaisant evidence of the score of ladies who, in their inability to say anything more credible in her favour, have agreed to speak highly of her good temper. In their desire to account for their goodwill towards a

congenial comrade, men of weak descriptive powers are apt to fall back on an epithet which, in ordinary gossip, seldom means more than that the person to whom it is applied knows how to make himself agreeable to men. Certain physical deficiencies preclude individuals of the male sex from whatever advantages may result from a reputation of manliness. Your uncommonly manly personage may not be less than five feet ten inches in height; he must have a loud and authoritative, but withal agreeable, voice; he may be stout and of a presence indicative of habitual self-indulgence, but his stoutness may not be absolutely disfiguring, or likely to result in bodily indolence. But if he complies with these conditions, and has a knack of rendering himself acceptable to his companions, there does not live the mean-spirited, sordid, and thoroughly false fellow, who may not hope to hear himself applauded for manliness.

When I recall all the sorry creatures who have been described in my hearing as "doosid manly fellows," I am almost tempted to think

that a condition of Bohemian vagabondage and domestic uncleanness must be peculiarly favourable to the development of masculine nobleness. So long as he could extort money from his impoverished mother, and find the means of subsistence without sponging on the financial resources of his friends about town, that blatant, broad-shouldered mendicant, Marmaduke Tando, of the Middle Temple and the Marlborough Club, was credited with manliness by the quid-nuncs of the Marlborough and the rest of his not extremely fastidious adherents. "Manliness," also, was held to be the moral specialty of Smart Bubbleton, Esq., of the Inland Revenue Office, and divers residences duly registered in the archives of the Commissioners of the Court of Bankruptcy, so long as he contrived to maintain an appearance of growing prosperity at the expense of that large army of credulous tradesmen who, without being a whit more respectable than the man who fleeced them, were blockheads enough to imagine that so smart a fellow as Bubbleton would be sure to pull through his little difficulties, and that Mrs.

Bubbleton's diamonds and lace would be paid for sooner or later. So long as Bubbleton was meanly content to live like an honest clerk of a public office, on his modest earnings and the income arising from his wife's small settlement, he was rather looked down upon by his few associates for being a man whose Israelitish face was seldom so clean as soap and water could make it, and whose sprawling lips were apt to be rebellious at times, when their proprietor was bent on producing a thoroughly aspirated "h." But when Bubbleton turned swindler, he succeeded in attracting some two or three hundred people who consented to speak civil things of him. To commend him for his good looks was out of the question, for, even when Bubbleton had hidden his ugly mouth under a moustache, his face was more calculated to rouse the terror of children than the admiration of women. Even flattery could not venture to laud him for unusual cleverness. But society felt itself bound to do something for the social reputation of the man of whose existence nine-tenths of his acquaintance would have never

heard, had he possessed the spirit and hardihood to resist the promptings of his contemptible vanity. So society decreed that poor Bubbleton should take rank amongst the manly fellows," and amongst the representatives of English manliness he had his place, until his certificates of social worth were rudely cancelled by the proceedings of a court of justice. In fairness, however, to Bubbleton's approvers, it must be acknowledged that they did not persist in their erroneous estimate of his moral nature after he had opened their eyes to his unworthiness. Most of them showed much more alacrity in dropping him than they had displayed in taking him up. No homily can be more fervid or edifying than the oration which Selim Tiptoft, R.A., who had been Bubbleton's closest friend during the heyday of the impostor's prosperity, delivered upon the weakness and uniform unmanliness of his old chum's character and career.

Let it not, however, be imagined that the foundations of Major Tilbury's reputation were of Bubbletonian inadequacy and flimsiness.

His appearance, as we have seen, was certainly not devoid of manliness ; and it was none the less in harmony with his fame because the harshness and sinuous vigour of his hair, curling even to its roots upon his head, indicated that the closeness and faultlessness of his military coiffure resulted from the constant vigilance and stern discipline of a resolute hair-dresser, whose art alone preserved the well-clipped and almost sleek Major from being a prodigy of hirsute development and shaggy wildness. Nor were his temper and tastes incongruous with his special renown. There was no taint of physical cowardice in his composition, though his nature was not innocent of certain superstitious tendencies which are apt to engender cowardice. He cherished a genuine liking, which at times almost rose to be an enthusiasm, for field-sports ; and though he never owned an expensive animal, and would jocularly describe himself as the worst-mounted officer in Her Majesty's army, he was allowed to be one of the boldest and cleverest heavy riders in the Artillery. Endowed with

an excess of muscular energy, he spared no pains to excel in masculine pastimes. His most familiar friends never imagined how much he did and suffered, on first arriving at Quebec, to win an honourable place amongst the skaters of the fashionable skating-rinks. To commend such a man for having a particular kind of manliness was not to misuse the word ; but even Joseph Curtain Tilbury's character for being a "doosid manly fellow" was less due to his essentially masculine powers and accomplishments, than to the less creditable peculiarities that rendered him very agreeable to his men-friends.

That he was popular in the service was unquestionable. From generals to cadets everyone knew and reported well of him. The veterans of the Artillery were pleased to think that he exercised a beneficial influence on youngsters in discountenancing the military fashion of high play, and in setting them an example of prudence in private, and of zeal in professional, affairs. The youngsters, on the other hand, felt it an honour to be allowed to

call him Joe when they met him in hunting-field or barrack-yard. By seniors and juniors he was equally liked, and he flattered them both in different ways. Perhaps no man was ever a more skilful adulator than Major Tilbury, who never held intercourse with a professional superior without exhibiting a pleasant mind-fulness of his companion's rank, and yet was so outspoken, hearty, almost bluff in his mode of address, that no one ever suspected him of sycophancy. In like manner he was one of those adroit boasters who gain credit for modesty by the very means which they employ to magnify themselves unduly. The frank admissions of the narrowness of his private means, the occasional jocular references to the more fortunate circumstances of his powerful relatives, and the casual depreciative allusions to the Herefordshire Tilburies, with which he not seldom seasoned his small-talk, created an impression that his social story was highly honourable, and exalted him in the world's esteem, whilst implying that he was too simple and sensible a fellow to wish to be anything greater than plain

Joe Tilbury. No man, it was felt, could speak so highly of his more than respectable family, and at the same time be guilty of secret arrogance or uneasiness on the score of his descent. No one could touch so pleasantly on the affluence of his fortunate kindred, and be jealous of their prosperity. No one could be so playful about his straitened means, without being generously indifferent to the disadvantages of poverty. Moreover, by uniformly taking up the position of a poor man, Joseph Curtain Tilbury placed the systematic economy, which characterized his personal expenditure, beyond suspicions of meanness, and added to the merit of the small pecuniary services which, it was known, he was capable of rendering to his friends in their moments of financial difficulty.

But perhaps the chief cause of his popularity with his friends of the army was the never-failing flow of animal spirits that disposed him at all moments to be the hilarious, garrulous boon companion of the idlers of a garrison. Possessing a copious, if not choice, repertory of comic stories, which he delivered with excellent mimetic

ability, he was the life of mess-rooms, and enjoyed that reputation for conversational sprightliness which is often won by the jovial repeater of other men's *mots*. Seen on his legs amongst a knot of martial auditors, Major Tilbury was often observed with a jolly grin on his handsome face, whilst he drew aside a special chum, who knew from the jovial grimace that Joe Tilbury was primed to fire off another "good thing." Sometimes he would prepare an admiring listener for a boisterous pleasantry by digging him smartly in the ribs, and saying, "Now, old boy, here's *one* for you." In one or two respects he was superior to most jesters of his coarse and common quality; for he was never slow to scream with uproarious glee over the ludicrous anecdotes of a rival in his own low line of jocular art, never overtopped the stories or corrected the blunders of less skilful gossip-mongers, never appropriated without permission a comrade's successful *jeu d'esprit*. Very many of Major Tilbury's facetiae were taken, I am bound to confess, from modern editions of "Joe Miller;" and as I wish this work to be no less ac-

ceptable in drawing-rooms than in bachelors' snuggeries, I have no intention to spice its pages with the broadest and most pungent of the Major's smart stories. But in behalf of the least delicate of them, it can honestly be averred that they did not shock the moral or æsthetic sense of the masculine sets in which Joseph Curtain Tilbury loved to shine.

That Major Tilbury's acquaintance rated him somewhat above his deserts, I can readily believe. Indeed the style of the rollicking officer of Artillery was so decidedly inferior to the manner of the majority of his friends, that any severe censor, of Miss Messurier's type of severe gentility, might well be excused for wondering how they came to tolerate him so universally, and applaud him so heartily. It is also very probable that of the gentlemen who extolled Joe Tilbury there were some who made charitable allowances for him as the chartered libertine of the military cliques, and overlooked what was most objectionable in his eccentricities, in consideration of his being "quite a character." I am disposed to think that

any youngster of the Artillery, who should at the present time take Joe Tilbury for a model, would soon be called to order by his seniors, and even acquire the unenviable notoriety of a noisy cad. It is certain that Major Tilbury would have sunk in the regard of his associates had they known as much of him as the reader will in due course discover. His character would have been greatly damaged by the discovery that, instead of being the poor man that he delighted to represent himself, he had saved a considerable sum of money by his steadily-practised economies, and by prudent husbandry of the sufficient, though limited, means with which he started in life. Possibly he would have been cut or cold-shouldered by the majority of his supporters, had they known that, whilst loudly condemning high play, and refusing to countenance it in his own rooms, Joseph Curtain Tilbury was so careful and methodical a player at the snug little loo parties, to which he habitually drew his acquaintance to play for ridiculously low stakes, that his tables yielded him annually a

comfortable addition to his more than sufficient income.

But Joseph Tilbury had escaped through a long series of years the exposure that is apt to befall less cautious schemers; and his reputation for manliness and the other qualities of a deuced good fellow had never stood higher than it did in Quebec, on the morning after the party at Lady Morton's house, of which we have already heard Felix and Felicia Avalon speak with approval.

The big clock of the Artillery Barracks was marking the time of day, 2.30 P.M., when Major Tilbury, dressed in civilian's costume, and walking with his stateliest gait, was seen to cross the Residence Court of the said barracks by two youthful officers who were enjoying a post-luncheon smoke at a second-floor window of the building specially provided for the accommodation of Artillery officers stationed at Quebec.

The two young soldiers were Frank (*alias* Dandy) Trevor, lieutenant of Artillery, and his most intimate friend, Maurice (*alias* Mouse)

Ponsford, lieutenant of the 40th line regiment, then stationed at the Cape Diamond garrison. The Mouse and the Dandy were as thick as thieves, whatever that may mean; holding precisely the same views on all questions of clothing, and never allowing thier slight differences of opinion respecting combinations of tobacco to disturb their affectionate intercourse. Whilst strenuous devotion to the arts of personal adornment left the Dandy no energy for the study of tobacco in its darker and more repulsive forms, the Mouse, never deigning to fill pipe with his comrade's effeminate mixture of Turkish weeds, persisted in smoking Cavendish and the strongest shag. "There's nothing like Cavendish," Maurice was wont to observe, "for letting you know that you are going the pace. If I were to smoke your dried rose-leaves, Dandy, I should never wake in the morning with a rough tongue and a shaking hand."

So long as Major Tilbury was within sight, his young friends watched him in silence; but as soon as he had passed through the great gate and disappeared from view, they ex-

changed nods of comic significance, and then broke into laughter.

“Joe has determined to take his header this eventful afternoon,” remarked the Dandy, who enjoyed Major Tilbury’s closest confidence.

“Good luck to him,” said Mouse Ponsford, after a few vigorous puffs at his meerschaum.

“He does not want our good wishes. Bless you, the thing is settled! Joe isn’t the flat to give a woman a chance of refusing him. The whole affair is settled.”

“How so?”

“He has sounded her in every way. Point of fact, I may say she has accepted him.”

“Before he has proposed to her?”

“Precisely. Joe is an old soldier. He let her see that he would make her an offer, *if* she would consent to accept him in case he asked her. You see? ‘Shan’t commit myself until you have pledged your honour not to make a fool of me,—that’s just what he as good as said to her. Whereto the fascinating creature replied in proper phraseology, ‘A wink is as good as a nod to a willing animal. You’re the

man for me. Don't be afraid to speak out.' So, you see, Joe has nothing to fear. When I say that he is going in for his header, I only mean that he will now deliberately put his hand to the compact, and fix himself beyond the power of drawing back."

"It seems queer, though, don't it?" remarked young Maurice Ponsford, with an air of boyish surprise and amusement. "The answer before the question is a novel arrangement."

"Nothing novel in it," responded the Dandy, with a display of inoffensive disdain for his friend's simplicity. "That's how offers are usually managed. Like any other treaty, a matrimonial alliance ought always to be the immediate result of preliminary negotiations, which, if they break through, leave neither party in a scrape."

"She's a devilish showy woman!—'bout the best-groomed filly in Quebec!"

"Filly!—mare you mean! I never looked closely at her teeth, but I have a suspicion that she is a goodish bit older than she pretends to be. Anyhow she has been on the market here several seasons."

“She hasn’t remained on hand for want of bidders. My Colonel, who knows Quebec well, and has relations in the colony, was saying the other day that no Quebec girl had refused more offers than Miss Avalon.”

“No doubt,” assented the Dandy, in his most magnificent style, as he drew himself up to the full height of his slight and rather graceful figure, “but all the fellows whom she has sent to the right-about are colonists. Joe is the first man from England who has paid her the compliment of looking at her with a view to business. Your colonial girls of ambition and capability always look out for a matrimonial settlement in London.”

“I don’t like to hear of a girl’s having had a lot of offers,” observed the Mouse, after a pause, when he had refilled and relit his meerschaum. “That sort of thing, you know, isn’t to a girl’s credit. It mayn’t mean vice; but it looks uncommonly like mischief.”

“Under ordinary circumstances, you are right. But you mayn’t be hard, Mouse, on a girl in Miss Avalon’s position. What was she to do? The

Canadian Yanks and storekeepers would admire her. She could not help that. They would make her offers. She never asked 'em. I really don't think a woman is bound to say 'Yes' to the first man who sinks to his right Mary-bone, and says 'Take me!'"

"I detest flirts," warmly ejaculated the Mouse, who secretly regarded himself as the blighted victim of a perfidious damsel.

"Then you are a universal misogynist," retorted Lieutenant Trevor, with playful cynicism.

"What's that, Dandy? A misogynist! You Woolwich men are so proud of your superior education, that you must be always stodging fellows with long words."

"Anyhow, flirt or no flirt," continued the Dandy, "she'll do very well for Joe. She isn't up to the mark in figure; she is a doosid deal too tall, and she has no more shape than a pump or a gate-post; but Joe is one of those fellows who can overlook any defect in a woman, who has height, and is a showy high-stepper. Then, too, she has a goodish lump of money in the Canadian sixes."

“Must have, by the way in which she and her brother live.”

“Oh! it ain’t much—seven or eight thousand—just enough to tile Joe in and make him comfortable. She comes of a right good stock in the way of blood; and though her voice is too drum-like and manly for my liking, it has none of the vile, through-your-nose drawl of the inferior Canadian girls.”

“Yes, take her for all in all—she’ll do.”

“And mark ye, Mouse,” rejoined the Dandy, in a serious and almost solemn tone, “Joe has come to the time when he ought to fix himself. He ain’t a chicken; and though he is a doosid manly fellow, and a dear old boy, he ain’t the man he was by a long piece. With careful usage he may keep the road and trot to cover for several years, but he can scarcely be called a safe mount across country.”

“He is as active as ever.”

“Ah! but he has more than one screw loose.”

“He hasn’t a grey hair on his nob,”

“True; but mind, and don’t let it go further,” responded Lieutenant Trevor, lowering his voice

whilst he basely betrayed a friend's confidence, "I *happen* to know that for the last ten months he has used Kerbstone's Patent Hair-Restorer."

"You don't mean it?"

"He took to it soon after he began to prance about Miss Avalon's long skirts. What's more, it was not a sprain that shut him up last October—not a bit of it. I come of a medical family, you know—my grandad was one of George the Third's physicians—and I have the family eye for diseases. Joe's sprain was gout—a slight attack, no doubt, but still it was gout."

"It's uncommon plucky of him, then," urged the Mouse, whose loyalty to the Major of Artillery was much more thorough and zealous than Trevor's devotion to Fay Avalon's suitor, "to go on as he does with muscular business."

"It's uncommon foolhardy in him to drink so much beer, though our doctor has told him again and again that it will find him out before long at a vital point. And he ought not, at his time of life, to smoke so much cheap tobacco. He ought to take to claret and cigars."

"Everyone knows that he isn't rich," expostu-

lated Mouse Ponsford, who did not relish the severe and anatomical criticisms which the Dandy was delivering with respect to their absent friend, "and it strikes me it is very greatly to his credit that he smokes and drinks what he can afford to smoke and drink, and nothing better."

"No doubt," persisted the censorious Dandy, "but it does not follow that he should smoke and drink so much of them. The beer is beginning to tell on him."

"Can't see it? He appears to me to be in excellent form."

"Form! Where are your eyes, Mouse? Just look at his figure."

"Well, just a trifle podgy—nothing for a man of his height and active habits."

"Ah! my boy, the question is not, what it is now, but what it will be a year or two hence. Podginess is a growing evil. When it has once seized upon a man it never leaves him, or ceases to work him woe. Figure," continued the Dandy, with oracular solemnity, as he glanced at his own delicate waist, "is the

most precious and fleeting of man's physical endowments. Until he has lost it, the successful man does not know how much it has contributed to his success. To have it, is in many cases to have the power of winning friends and extorting the world's homage. To lose it, is to become ludicrous. Soon after he lost his figure, Louis Philippe lost his throne. Let the present emperor lose his figure, and he will lose prestige, influence, moral weight, until the sceptre slips from his hand.

The Mouse laughed, but admitted that "figure" went a great way with women ; and that, no doubt, if Joe Tilbury was likely to lose his figure, he did well to make his game in the matrimonial market without delay.

Whilst Major Tilbury's friends were thus humorously and critically discussing his qualifications, and the merits of the lady whom he had designed to attach to himself in the capacity of a wife, that gentleman was wending his way towards the Fairmead, on the best possible terms with himself. Before emerging from the town, he surveyed with pleasant satisfaction the

reflection of his imposing presence in the plate-glass windows of several of the principal shops of St. John's Street; and, as he paced leisurely up the St. Foy Road, he derived a benevolent delight from the thought that, if Felicia Avalon would be a creditable wife for him to bring back to England, she would deem herself no less fortunate in having for her husband one of the best-looking officers of Her Majesty's Artillery. No fear that he would find the lady reluctant to receive him lessened his customary serenity, as he sauntered beneath the trees that bordered the Fairmead demesne, and turned into the gardens of her villa.

And on this point Felicia Avalon was by no means disposed to occasion him disappointment. On the contrary, she had made every provision for the reception of her expected visitor.

Left to her own devices, by her brother's departure for the performance of his ordinary avocations at the Quebec Gaol, she spent an hour in writing letters, and half an hour in a solitary promenade through the shady paths of the Fairmead shrubberies, during which walk in the

familiar grounds her face had worn an aspect of composure and joyous contentment that would certainly have afforded her approaching suitor no discouragement, could he have witnessed it.

Having re-entered the house, she summoned her staid and elderly maid-servant to the drawing-room.

“Martha,” she observed to the domestic, who had served in the Fairmead household from the day when Foxe Avalon brought Marie Messurier to the villa, “I expect Major Tilbury to call at three o’clock.”

“Indeed, Miss Avalon, and will you be at home?” inquired Martha, who had conceived a distrust of the Major similar in kind to the warmer sentiment of aversion with which he was regarded by her master.

“Yes; I shall be at home to him.”

“Umph!” grunted Martha, who enjoyed an old servant’s privilege to express her opinions on all matters of domestic interest.

“And I shall be at home to no one else.”

“Indeed, Miss Avalon!”

“You may show him into this room; and

take care that no one disturbs us."

"If Miss Messurier should come?" asked Martha, who by no means relished the thought of a confidential tête-à-tête between Miss Felicia and "that presuming Major."

"She won't come," responded Miss Avalon, cutting away Martha's suddenly-entertained hope of a seasonable interruption to an interview of which she cordially disapproved. "I have written to aunt, and told her not to call on me this morning."

Martha's countenance fell, as she replied, sulkily and tartly, "Certainly, Miss Avalon, I will attend to your orders."

"You may go now."

But Martha stayed, struggling vainly with the impulses of an affectionate heart, which prompted her to take some unusual step for her mistress's protection from an unknown calamity.

"God bless you, Miss Avalon!" at last the faithful creature blurted out, "I do hope you are not going to say anything foolish to the Major that you'll live to repent."

A look of displeasure took possession of Felicia Avalon's handsome face; but in three seconds it gave way to an expression of bewitching drollery and tenderness.

And before the sweet expression had passed from her bright brown eyes and delicious lips, Fay Avalon put her right arm fondly round her servant's neck, and calling her by the title which in her childhood she used to apply habitually to the right womanly woman, said, "Give me one kiss, Nursie, and call me Fay, as you used to do."

"Oh! Fay, my darling, my dear!" ejaculated the woman, as the tears sprung to her eyes, whilst her lips touched her mistress's smooth cheek, "you're too good to everybody. Though I am your servant, and no more, I love you as much as ever I loved my little girl who is in heaven."

"You needn't fear that I am going to say anything to Major Tilbury that I shall live to repent," Fay said quietly, when she had responded to Martha's kiss with a similar endearment.

“Then you don’t mean to tell him that you’ll be Mrs. Tilbury?”

Whereupon Fay Avalon uttered a peal of rich laughter, and replied—

“What an absurd woman you are, Nursie! Why, I would sooner discharge you and look out for a new maid.”

So there was an end to Martha’s fears just about the moment when Joseph Curtain Tilbury’s hopes were most sanguine.

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CHAPTER XI.

MAJOR TILBURY GETS HIS ANSWER, AND SOMETHING MORE.

NOTWITHSTANDING his "manliness" and sufficiency of "pluck," the nervous system of Major Joseph Curtain Tilbury experienced a slight tremor, which he was constrained to correct by throwing an unusual amount of muscular vigour into his step as he followed Martha across the vestibule of Felicia Avalon's villa from the hall door to the entrance of the drawing-room. But his usual self-possession returned to him as soon as his eyes rested on the lady of the house sitting precisely in the middle of a small sofa, which was so placed that she could at her pleasure rest her arms on a table suitably decorated with knick-knacks and rich-

ly-embellished editions of English poets. Instead of disconcerting him, the perfect composure of Miss Avalon's fine countenance, and the remarkable coolness of her whole air, reassured him most agreeably, and afforded him a pleasant confidence that his part in the interview might be altogether simple and devoid of theatrical effort. It was manifest that the lady felt no alarm at the position, and that it would not be necessary for him to give utterance to any violent protestations, or throw himself into romantically dramatic attitudes. Having cherished a slight fear that he would be required to fall on his knee at the moment of making his offer, Major Tilbury was pleased to read in Fay's looks that she was quite prepared for a matter-of-fact, prosaic, business-like interview. In the privacy of his barrack-quarters Joe Tilbury had provided for the worst by a course of genuflectory practice, in which he had come to the conclusion that, though he could fall on his right knee with faultless grace, he could not resume the erect posture so easily and naturally as he could desire.

It was therefore a relief to him to see that there would be no occasion for him to kneel. Clearly Miss Avalon had no desire to be treated like a poetical young school-miss, but as a woman who, knowing her own mind, and thoroughly aware of his purpose, had no inclination for "a scene." The whole affair would be as simple and straightforward as an ordinary morning call.

As there was no room for him on the sofa occupied by Miss Avalon, and no seat more conveniently placed for him than the chair directly opposite the said sofa, Joseph Tilbury, after shaking hands with Felicia, and returning her apparently cordial smile, composed himself on the particular piece of furniture which the lady had herself put for his accommodation before he entered the room.

"It is uncommonly kind of you, Miss Avalon," Major Tilbury observed, by way of opening the proceedings, when he had deliberately seated himself, "to receive me thus promptly and kindly; and I am the more grateful to you, because I flatter myself that, when I asked you last night to grant me this interview, I made

you understand the purpose which gave me courage to solicit so particular a favour."

With a smile that, in the eyes of the enamoured officer, imparted an indescribable loveliness to her face, and in a voice of cordial sympathy, Miss Avalon replied, with the most bewitching coolness and *naïveté*—

"I imagine what it is you wish to say to me, Major Tilbury, and the anticipation of the announcement does not fill me with dismay."

"Now, I suppose, Miss Avalon," rejoined Joseph Tilbury, "to be perfectly in rule, I ought to sigh, put my hand to my heart, stammer out half a dozen incoherent words, turn red, and then fall on one knee, and implore you to consider my petition with the benignity characteristic of your amiable disposition. Allow me to propose that you imagine I have done all that sort of thing."

"On the other hand, I suppose, it is incumbent on me to say, 'Be kind enough to be more explicit, that we may not misunderstand one another on an affair of some importance.' Imagine that I have done so."

The playfulness with which Fay Avalon adopted his vein of untimely banter was all the more piquant to her auditor, because a tone of resoluteness and gravity was perceptible in her voice.

“Nothing else shall be left to imagination, Felicia,” the suitor blurted out in his bluntest and most earnest style. “You shall hear me tell you the plain truth—awkwardly, perhaps, but strongly. I want you to be my wife. I have studied you for some few years with the profoundest admiration, and now that my heart is in my throat, it gives me courage to tell you what I have sometimes thought I never should find the pluck to say—I love you—I love you with all my soul and life, and you must promise to be my wife!”

As the man uttered these words, his assumed levity forsook him, and such a glow of passion brightened his eyes that Fay Avalon was satisfied of the sincerity of his declaration, and of the intensity of his emotion—saw that she was the actual mistress of his selfish desires; saw that, so far as a hard, sensual, dissipated man

of the world could love, he loved her—fiercely, grossly, hatefully !

“Come, come,” she responded lightly, declining to lay aside at present the tone of railery and unseasonable jocoseness which she had adopted at his suggestion, “let us imagine all that. We agreed that we would avoid melodrama. We are old enough, both of us, to be able to dispense with the play of children. You are no green boy, Major Tilbury ; I am no unsophisticated girl, but a woman. Shall I shock you,” she added, with a sly look, that was at the same time mischievous and tender, “when I confess that you are not the first man who has entertained your ambition ? If ever I am married, I must be taken on my own terms.”

“For Heaven’s sake name them, Miss Avalon. Whatever they are, I will gratefully accede to them. No, don’t name them. Allow me the honour of throwing myself on your generosity, and agreeing to them whilst they are unknown. Surely I should trust you, when I ask you to trust me.”

“Fie ! fie !” interrupted Fay Avalon, placing

her two elbows on the table as she leaned forwards, and, extending her white, taper fingers towards the perplexed man, laughed at him with maddening devilry. "A moment since you were the cold-hearted man of business, now you are the reckless gamester, who plays blind chance, and turns away from the table on which he throws his all."

When her laughter ceased, she said in a startlingly different voice, as though she felt herself bound to preserve her suitor from perpetrating an indiscretion which he might speedily repent, "But, seriously, Major Tilbury, have you regarded this proposal of yours from every point of view? You should not forget the wishes, or lose sight of the prejudices, of your family. If I were to consent, what would the Herefordshire Tilburies, who may have far more ambitions hopes for you, say to your choice? You know, I am only a colonial girl."

The malicious twinkling of Felicia Avalon's dark eyes, that so little accorded with her affected seriousness, should have put her victim on his guard, and shown him that she was only

playing with his egregious vanity, and his ludicrous belief in his own superiority to the Canadian colonists; but he only saw in her words an occasion for paying her a compliment at the expense of his friends, and exhibiting his own generous disregard for what he necessarily regarded as a slight drawback to the advantages of the alliance which he desired.

“For the matter of that, I am my own master, and my people are too sensible to think that I am bound to please them in my marriage. So long as I don’t bring discredit on them, they can have no right to complain. As for the Canadian families, you know how I esteem them. No doubt they are rough and colonial; but though you are one of them, in a certain sense, by birth and education, you have the style of the mother country, as much as you would have had it if you had been born and raised in Gloucestershire, which has no finer family than the Avalons.”

“So you have told me before. And of course it is very agreeable to me to know you think so. But Lady Tilbury and your cousins may think

you no impartial judge of my merits," Felicia rejoined with exquisite humility.

"My dear Miss Avalon," urged the Major, "you are troubling yourself most fantastically about a matter that should not afford you a moment's concern. My people will be as proud of you as even I could wish them to be. When we shall have settled in England, you'll laugh at this queer anxiety, as the drollest and most absurd of fancies."

"Settle in England!"

"Is the prospect displeasing?"

"Nothing that I can think likely to happen to me, Major Tilbury, shall ever induce me to live permanently in any land but the colony of my birth. Ah! you are surprised! You would feel no surprise if you knew how I love Quebec and its people; how I prize the honour in which I, as my father's daughter, am held in this glorious and beautiful city; how I love the dear old home in which you see me, surrounded with every happiness but one that I wish for!"

This was a novel view of Felicia Avalon for Joseph Tilbury. He had taken it as a matter

of course that she would gladly exchange Canada for England, Quebec for London, the social status of a colonial woman for the condition of a married lady in the mother country.

“My scheme for my own life,” continued the lady of colonial prejudices, “has been to remain in the society where I love everyone, and where everyone cherishes some kind of affectionate regard for me. For myself I should prefer to live on as I have done since my father’s death, the companion of my brother, who could not endure separation from me. Affection and duty, love and a reasonable recognition of the responsibilities attaching to me as a woman, might decide me to marry under certain circumstances; but nothing could reconcile me to the thought of a marriage which would exile me from Canada.”

Here, then, it flashed upon Joseph Tilbury, was the main condition of the terms on which Felicia Avalon had intimated that she might consent to accept him. And it appeared no such very hard condition to the man who was possessed by a fierce passion for the woman who prized Quebec beyond the rest of the world,

and would regard her removal from Canada as tantamount to banishment from her native land. To live in a colony had never been his purpose; but expatriation with Fay Avalon seemed to him to be preferable to his old life in England without her. Moreover, life in Canada, as the Major had learnt from some years' experience, was not without special pleasures in compensation for its inconveniences. He liked the society of the garrison, the sports of the adjacent country, the families of the city. If he married Fay, he could take up his abode at the Fairmead, and participate in the social respect accorded to the Avalons as persons of unimpeachable colonial status. Since the military authorities in London had decided that, in consequence of recent re-arrangements of the service, he should remain for another term of a few years in Quebec, it would be possible for him to retain his commission for some time after his marriage with Felicia.

Having rapidly summed up and balanced all the advantages and disadvantages of a concession to what he had almost instantaneously

come to regard as a stipulation, Major Tilbury assured Miss Avalon that in order to be her husband he would gladly relinquish his profession and his native country. To be her husband was his object, and to attain his end he would sacrifice everything he possessed, with the exception of honour. Her people should be his people!

“You pay me a great compliment,” observed Felicia, exhibiting in her countenance signs of satisfaction at this considerable proof of the influence which she had gained over him.

“No compliment, dear Miss Avalon. Love knows no sacrifices. It’s pure selfishness; and whatever it does that has an appearance of sacrifice it does for its own ends. Men in love are far too eager for their own sakes, and bent on their own ends, to do or say civil things out of mere complaisance.”

“Still you do compliment me by showing how much you prize me and desire me. Then the first point is settled. If I consent to marry you I shall never be asked by you to leave Canada?”

“Never.”

“And now for the other points.”

“Bother the other points, Felicia,” Joseph Tilbury exclaimed, as he gave an indication of a purpose to spring from his chair and approach the lady.

But, ere the purpose was effected, he was stayed by the singular look of displeasure which his movement and last words elicited from his companion.

“Stay where you are for a few minutes longer, I beg you,” Fay Avalon said, in a tone that, notwithstanding its mildness, was irresistibly authoritative. “And,” she added, in the same tranquil voice, when he had yielded obediently to her command, “don’t call me Felicia again till I give you leave to do so. To you—at least for the present—I am Miss Avalon. I never accorded you the privilege of playing with my Christian name.”

A pause, during which Felicia Avalon gathered her mental and moral forces for the continuation of her difficult, and perhaps scarcely justifiable, game.

“My father more than once, towards the close of life,” she at length remarked, “spoke to me about the probability of my sooner or later marrying. He had reasons for thinking me not constituted to be the contented wife of just any man—or rather, let me say, for thinking me qualified by nature to be an unspeakably miserable woman, if I became the wife of a mean and immoral man. Only a few weeks before his death he said to me very solemnly, ‘Fay, never consent to be the wife of a man of whose truthfulness and benevolence you have the least doubt. It would go hard with you if you married a liar, or a man of cruel nature.’ Speaking perhaps somewhat under the influence of a prejudice natural to a man of his honourable lineage, he added, ‘And you will make a rash experiment if you ever unite yourself to a man who has reason to blush for his origin.’”

This was said very slowly—almost with the deliberateness and vocal clearness of an actress speaking a part on the stage. The paternal counsel, moreover, was rendered all the more painfully impressive to Miss Avalon’s auditor by

the way in which she unintentionally imitated Foxe Avalon's voice, whilst repeating his advice.

"You increase my confidence," rejoined Joseph Tilbury, concealing a secret uneasiness under a confident tone, that was scarcely in harmony with a slight paleness that overspread his usually bright-coloured face. "My family, thank Heaven, is one that no peer would blush to enter. I have never set up for a philanthropist, or anything better than an honest gentleman and good officer; but it is allowed by those who know me that I am not wanting in kindness and humanity. As for my truthfulness, no man ever questioned my honour."

With a quickness that did not violate ladylike decorum, though it would have reminded any third auditor of the suddenness and smartness with which a barrister throws a startling inquiry at a witness whom he wishes to demolish, Fay Avalon asked, "Has any woman ever questioned it?"

A smile played over Major Tilbury's comely face, a smile that was excusable and natural,

since the vain man regarded Fay's interrogation as a sign that she was capable of jealousy, and was secretly piqued by some rumours of attention that he had paid to one of her rivals.

“Pon my honour, Miss Avalon,” he replied, with mingled jocosity and earnestness, when his first amusement had subsided, “if you were by the waving of a magic wand to assemble on the lawn before this house all the ladies of America and Europe to whom I have had the honour of being introduced during my whole life, I could without apprehension say to them, ‘If there is one amongst you all who can prove me a false man, speak now, and prove me unworthy of the affection of the only woman I have ever loved!’”

“What, you have *never* loved any woman but me?” Fay interrupted, in a dry, hard, mocking key, strangely unlike her natural voice. “Think, Major Tilbury, ‘never’ is a long time.”

Abashed by the interruption, though not disabused of his agreeable misconception, Joseph Tilbury expostulated,

“Of course, Miss Avalon, you don’t require a complete and exact confession of every flirtation that relieved the monotony of my life when I was a Woolwich cadet. You don’t want me to go back so far as my boyhood.”

“Not so far back as that,” Fay Avalon assured him with a satirical emphasis that brought the purple to his ears.

“And surely my assurance, with respect to my manly career, satisfies you?”

“Not quite.”

“About what do you wish for information?”

“Nothing. There is a matter respecting which, I am thankful to say, I require no information. Still I will stimulate your curiosity with a question.”

“I am impatient to hear it.”

Again, bringing the tips of her fingers together, as she looked forward, and over them at her companion, she inquired, with torturing precision of utterance, “You remember Millicent Lacroix, the girl who used to wait at Mostyn’s shop in the Market-Place?”

Had her eyes been closed, so that they could

not observe the livid pallor which instantly seized his countenance; had her ears been stopped, so that they could not hear his quick breathing, Felicia would have known that her inquiry had struck home to her antagonist's most vulnerable point. As it was, looking directly into his eyes, she scanned the evidences of his confusion and anger, until they slowly disappeared, and he had recovered the appearance of self-possession.

Major Tilbury was not the man to succumb without a struggle to an attack that after all might be no more than a reference to mere rumours prejudicial to his moral character. Conscious though he was of guilt, it occurred to him that Felicia Avalon might not be aware of the full extent of his wickedness. Ay, more, a hope came to him that, even if she knew the worst, Felicia Avalon might condone his offence, if he threw himself on her generosity with passionate avowals of his penitence and remorse. After all, Millicent Lacroix was nothing better than a pretty little milliner, one of a class of persons whom he had been trained by

corrupting circumstances to regard as the proper prey of his order. Felicia Avalon was, as she had herself intimated, no unsophisticated girl, but a woman, of years and worldly experience, who, of course, knew that officers in the army were no strait-laced precisians, and that it was no uncommon thing for girls of the lower classes to live in infamy. That she had permitted,—had actually encouraged his addresses—was evidence that she knew no great evil of him. And even if she had somehow learnt that Millie Lacroix had been his victim, her conduct justified the hope that she intended to treat his wrong-doing as a venial misdemeanour. Anyhow, he would not throw up his cards until she had shown her hand.

“I have heard of Millicent Lacroix,” he admitted. “In fact, I know something of that young person,—enough, indeed, to justify me in saying that she is no fit object for your sympathy. Truth to tell, the girl has been talked about,—is, I may say, notorious, shamefully notorious.”

“Oh,” pleaded Felicia Avalon, shrinking with

disgust at the man's baseness in thus turning upon the victim of his perfidy, whilst she overflowed with pity for the misery which his sin had wrought, "spare her, if you cannot respect me; spare her—now that she is dead."

"Dead!—By Jove!" Joseph Tilbury ejaculated, with surprise and genuine horror. "I did not know it was so bad as that."

"What better fate could have befallen her after she left Quebec? In His mercy, the good Father, who has forgiveness for all penitent sinners, spared her the punishment of protracted shame, and she is in Heaven. Is that a worse fate than you designed for her?"

"I designed for her!"

"Major Tilbury," interposed Felicia with a withering sternness in her calm face and steady voice, "don't play the hypocrite again in this room. Listen to me. I took an affectionate interest in that girl. She was descended from an honest French-Canadian family. Indeed, she and I had the same blood in our veins; for, a century or more since, there was a marriage between a Lacroix and a Messurier, which made

us tenth cousins. If our relationship were nearer, I should not blush to own it. And when the girl's parents died, it was I who induced her to come to Quebec. I procured her the situation she had in Mostyn's shop, and thereby I brought her to ruin. On leaving Quebec in ill-health, the miserable girl went to Montreal to be nursed by her aunt, who in due course wrote me a letter that caused me to run up the river to Montreal, in time to see her die—to see her buried with her babe that died, even whilst it killed her. On her death-bed Millicent Lacroix told me her whole story of foolishness and wickedness—a story which, out of tenderness to her memory, I have revealed to no one, not even to my brother. On her death-bed she commissioned me to convey to you an assurance of her forgiveness, and to return to you these presents. Take them, sir, together with the assurance that one of Millicent's last prayers was that you might repent, and be pardoned by Him who had pardoned her."

Whilst speaking the last words of this statement, Miss Avalon drew from the pocket of her

dress a packet, which she offered to Major Tilbury, who seized it, and whilst putting it in his coat delivered himself of a groan of rage and anguish.

The man's face was of ashy whiteness as his eyes fell before the disdainful regard of his companion, who intimated by her look and a movement of her right hand that she wished their interview to terminate without delay.

She had never appeared so lovely and nobly beautiful to her astounded admirer as she did when she thus attempted to dismiss him with scornful silence.

“Don't be too hard upon me, Miss Avalon. Have compassion for me as well as for her. Let your generous nature palliate my offences,” he implored in prelude to a statement of extenuating circumstances which he was preparing to force upon her. “The army is a bad school of morals. We men of the sword, who——”

“Sir,” interposed Felicia Avalon, rising from her seat and drawing herself to the full height of her queenly stature, as she struck him down with an air of splendid pride, “you forget that

you are talking to the daughter of an officer!"

"For Heaven's sake, pardon me!" prayed the culprit. "Other men have sinned in the same way, and found women to pardon them."

"Pardon you?—for Heaven's sake?" retorted Fay Avalon with bitter mockery. "The woman capable of pardoning you, in the full knowledge of what she pardons, must be sought in London, where I am told there are girls of gentle family, heartless nature, and sordid selfishness—who can be lenient to the repulsive vices of profligate men. But here, sir, you are in Canada, where it is still thought that men should be truthful and considerate for the weak. I am thankful to say that it is not my function to pardon offenders of your sort. If it were, sir, I should be unable to pardon Millicent's murderer."

In despair of softening the sternness or mitigating the rage of Millicent Lacroix's avenger, Joseph Tilbury arose with what small appearance of dignity he could command, and bowing to Felicia Avalon, observed, "At least, Miss Avalon, I have never failed in reverence for you, however blame-worthy I may have

been towards others. Whatever my misconduct, I did not come here with a purpose to outrage your feelings, but to render you what you just now admitted to be the greatest compliment that it was in my power to pay you. You might have responded to the man who put himself in your power with something less of harshness."

"Surely, sir," retorted Felicia Avalon, for the moment losing command of herself in a paroxysm of indignant aversion for her dupe, "even a woman may respond with insult to such an insult as you have put on me. Is it a compliment that you have dared to ask me to be your wife, your slave? Why, the words, in which you clothed your abominable proposition, were only a repetition of such phrases as you used to destroy a simple girl—*the girl you killed with words*. The very lip with which you hoped to touch this hand had upon it a *lie*. Oh, sir, you are surprised at my frankness. Excuse the rudeness of a colonial woman who can call the most offensive kind of falsehood by its right name, and has the hardihood to treat an unendurable insult with meet indignation. Why do

you linger here, sir? I have no more to say to you but this. When you spoke just now with slanderous disdain of poor Millicent Lacroix, it occurred to me that it was strange that even you did not spare her, out of sensitiveness for your own mother's shame."

Had Felicia Avalon forborne to give him this last cruel stab with a poisoned blade, he would have made no further reply to her reproaches. He would have left her, in fury and humiliation, but in no mood to wreak his vengeance upon her; and the whole subsequent course of her life might have been different. It would have been better for her in every way—better for her chances of happiness, and for her place in the esteem of those who read this history of her fortunes, if she had refrained from thus trampling on a fallen foe, and hurling down upon him a barbarous sarcasm. But the devil was just then master of her boiling blood; and maddened by the excitements of anger, disdain, vengeance, pity, and a sense of uncontrollable loathing, she ceased for the moment to be womanly.

That one last taunt, that final reference to a shame of which Joseph Avalon imagined all living persons to be ignorant, save the few individuals who were specially interested in keeping it secret; that insolent rejection of him as a base-born creature, was the one final lash of his flogging that provoked him to retaliate terribly on the cause of his humiliation. But for that last blow he would have endured his punishment like a cowed slave. But the sting of that affront called into action all the dormant ferocity of his by no means chivalric nature, and inspired him with satanic resentment.

With a quick step he brought himself close up to Felicia Avalon, and exhibiting to her a face empurpled and distorted with the fury of hatred, he hissed out, "At least, madam, the insult of which you complain was invited. You were at great pains to bring it on yourself."

The words penetrated to his enemy's sense of womanly dignity. She *had* brought the affront of his solicitations on herself. For many a month the recollection of the reproach

drove sleep from her pillow at moments when she most sorely needed rest. But that memory, though it tortured her acutely, was less productive of unrest to the sufferer than the recollection of the terrifying ferociousness of the look which accompanied the words, that had scarcely escaped from her enemy's lips, when he turned abruptly from her, and hastened from the Fairmead.

On being left to herself by Major Tilbury's quick though by no means premature departure, Felicia Avalon passed rapidly through a series of sharp and agonizing emotions. For a few minutes she exulted over the completeness and thoroughness of the punishment which she had inflicted on the destroyer of her miserable *protégée*, Millicent Lacroix. But the triumph was of very brief duration, and the short-lived satisfaction was never renewed. Then came a vivid recognition of all the ignominious artifices by which she had lured Millicent's betrayer into the position which enabled her to bestow on him a richly merited but unwomanly chastisement. Strange to say, she had never perceived the

unfeminine insolence and meanness of the steps which she had taken throughout several months for his discomfiture, until they had resulted in the too successful accomplishment of their object; but now that she had opened his eyes to his repulsiveness, and made herself the object of his implacable enmity, she saw her conduct in its proper light. No longer blinded by her disgust for the man, and by her sympathy for his victim, she realized the nature of her own behaviour, and forthwith magnified its most discreditable features. Nor could she deny to her own conscience that the craft and resoluteness, with which she had wreaked her vengeance on Major Tilbury were by no means innocent of an ambition to revenge her own indignity as well as Millicent's wrong. Had the culprit's crime against Millicent Lacroix been perpetrated before he had ventured to become her avenger's admirer, the latter would have contented herself with some less extravagant and more justifiable method of demonstrating her aversion to him. In that case she would have abhorred him no less strongly, but she would certainly have per-

secuted him less malignantly. "Who am I that I presume to punish sins?" she asked of her own heart, when tears of self-scorn were raining from her eyes, half an hour after Major Tilbury's departure, "and play the part of Providence? I have unsexed myself. He was no more than an admirer, a flatterer, when I resolved to draw him to me. I did draw that hateful creature to me; and I have lost my self-respect for ever. Oh! why was I made too manly in temper for a woman's place and work!"

A flood of tears followed this mental ejaculation, but it afforded her no relief. How could so proud and sympathetic and sensitive a creature reconcile herself to the scalding sense of self-abasement and shamefulness that possessed her as soon as she could review impartially all the deceptions, and meannesses, and indelicacies of her part in the drama on which the curtain had just fallen?

And then the angry eyes of the furious man, converted in a few minutes from her lover to her implacable and unscrupulous foe, rose before her mental vision, together with the terrifying

features of his visage. "He will do me wrong if it is in his power," she thought with a shudder. "I care not for myself. Let him do his worst, so that his retaliation affects me alone. But pray God he may not strike at me through my brother, or strike me so as to harm Felix! I told Martha I would not say anything to Major Tilbury which I should live to repent. I have broken my word sadly. I repent of nearly everything I said to him. I repent that I ever allowed him to—to insult me."

CHAPTER XII.

COMFORTERS IN THE HOUR OF TRIBULATION.

TO you, my bearded and philosophic reader, whose self-respect is stronger than your vanity, and cannot therefore be shattered or greatly disturbed by disdain or ridicule, it is difficult to realize the mental torture which Joseph Curtain Tilbury endured, in consequence of Miss Avalon's rejection of his suit. When you wooed without winning Lucretia Coldhart, the disappointment was certainly severe. A mishap on the Stock Exchange, depriving you in an hour of the gradual accumulations of several years of labour, would not occasion you more annoyance than Lucretia's cruelty caused you in the time when your heart was susceptible of the influences of beauty. It was a blow, a re-

verse, a defeat. You made no miserable pretence of regarding the matter as a joke. For awhile the misadventure caused you to eat too little and drink too much, and to utter cynical sentiments respecting the falsity of womankind. When your chagrin was most poignant, you discovered that Lucretia was nothing better than a charming doll; but you were never troubled by the conviction that you had rendered yourself absolutely despicable. Of course you derived no satisfaction from the knowledge that several of your own acquaintance, and as many of Lucretia's particular friends, were chuckling over your accident, even as benevolent men and women are wont to chuckle when they see a comrade get a tumble on the ice, in the hunting-field, or on a drawing-room carpet. But you could not help reflecting that, though unquestionably a doll, Lucretia was a charming doll, that you had proved your good taste in admiring her showy endowments, that you had displayed no egregious vanity and self-confidence in your bootless pursuit of her, and that even your most malicious associates thought

none the worse of you for your disaster. So, without making any absurd number of wry faces, you consumed the leek of disappointment, and bore yourself like a gentleman. The sorrow was transient; and when you led your blushing Frances (*née* Worthington) from what young people of ultra-romantic propensities still like to call the hymeneal altar, you were heartily glad that Lucretia had preferred old Jonas Stockdish with his money-bags to young Harry Marchmont with his prospects in Westminster Hall. But then, sir, you were no morbidly vain man, smarting under a galling consciousness of secret ignominy, and at the same time inordinately eager for social approbation.

Major Tilbury, on the contrary, was a gentleman whose vanity dominated all the other forces of his nature. The shame with which he reflected on the circumstances of his birth was the offspring of the same vanity that made him overrate the value of his popularity in mess-rooms, incited him to flatter others in order that they might flatter him in return, caused

him to employ artificial means for the concealment of the marks put upon him by time, and inspired him with an over-weaning admiration of himself. Elated by the preference which had been evinced for him by one of the handsomest women of Quebec, who was known to have declined suitors of great wealth and unexceptionable status, and confident in his power to win by the force of his personal attractions and conversational brilliance the girl whom so many men had courted in vain, he had made no secret in garrison-society of his intention to marry Fay Avalon. It was for him, and no other man, that she had grown to the perfection of her beauty. The pear was his, and would fall into his hand as soon as his appetite for it decided him to relinquish the freedom and privileges of a bachelor's existence.

Outside the military "sets" it was also more generally understood than the lady suspected, that Felicia Avalon, after refusing some of the richest and best-born men in the colony, had made up her mind to throw herself away on an Artillery officer almost old enough to be her

father, and possessing just no private fortune. Though she had flattered herself that her flirtation with Major Tilbury had neither occasioned much gossip nor attracted much attention, the affair had been in some way or other talked over in every gentle household within six miles of Cape Diamond ; and poor old Miss Messurier had been kept in a perfect fever of vexation by the busybodies who begged her to tell them if it was really true that her niece and Major Tilbury had agreed to put their horses together. That delicious old retailer of clack and tattle, Lady Morton, had no doubt whatever that Felicia had quite made up her mind not to lose a chance of becoming Mrs. Tilbury. “ Of course she’s a great fool to have set her heart on jumping upon the shoulders of that red-faced, swaggering, not-so-young-as-he-looks officer ; but still she is a dear girl, and an ornament to Quebec,” her ladyship had remarked to at least two dozen of her particular friends ; “ though her figure has no more shape in it than either of the gate-posts at the end of my drive. We shall miss her—her poor brother will miss her

very much; but it's better that she should go. Everybody ought to speak well of her; but, still, it must be admitted that she has been a terrible spoil-sport to other marriageable girls. It is sheer slander to call her a flirt. Until that noisy major crossed her path, she never paid mortal man any attention which would justify a censure or a suspicion. It was more her misfortune than her fault that men would persist in adoring her tallness and her handsome face. Still, she stopt the way, blocked the road, spoilt the sport of other girls, for whose sakes, if not for her own, she ought to have moved off into matrimony years ago." And in thus speaking, old Lady Morton gave utterance to sentiments in which several of the matrons of Quebec cordially concurred.

Under these circumstances, Joseph Tilbury was well aware that Felicia's rejection of his offer could not be kept secret. That she would expose him to the moralists of Quebec as the profligate wretch who had killed Millicent Lacroix he had no fear, since she had declared her resolution to be silent to the world concerning

that ghastly tale of common licentiousness, out of tender regard to the poor girl's memory. Moreover, though the tenth cousinship, of which Felicia Avalon had spoken as having existed between herself and Millicent, was no nearer or more important than the relationship born by many a peeress of Scotch family to the young milliner of whom her ladyship buys bonnets during the London season, out of clannish sentiment, it was a tie that would disincline the mistress of the Fairmead to trouble her Quebec friends about the ignominious fate of her humble relative. Other equally obvious facts concurred to assure Major Tilbury that Fay Avalon would not call attention to the manner in which she had visited him with her displeasure,—would not invite criticism of the artifices which she had employed to bring about his punishment. But, though she would be decorously and conveniently reticent, the necessary change in her demeanour would of itself declare to Quebec that she had rejected him disdainfully. Henceforth she would, of course, give the "cut direct" to the Major, towards whom her demeanour in

society had been hitherto abundantly gracious. He could not call at a "good house" in Quebec without being likely to encounter her; and yet, wherever and whenever they might meet, she would of course refrain from according him even the slightest recognition. The first party at which he and she should be simultaneously present would reveal to his military associates that he had been "pitched over" with contempt by the woman of whose hand he had been so boastfully secure, and of whose affectionate regard for him he had spoken so impudently, that Dandy Trevor and the other boys of the garrison had for several weeks been in the habit of terming Felicia "the future Mrs. Joe!"

As he realized, point by point, all the ludicrous and humiliating circumstances of his position, and the certainty that before forty-eight hours had passed all the coteries of the garrison and city would be gossiping and laughing about his misadventure, the vain man, to whom the sting of ridicule was unendurable, fell into such a panic of apprehensions

that he was for a short hour strongly disposed to fly from the persecution which he dreaded. "Confound her!" he groaned, "she meant to drive me from Quebec!"

Nor was he wrong in attributing this purpose to Fay Avalon, who had really calculated on rendering Canada so distasteful to her enemy that he would take an early opportunity to cross the Atlantic, on the plea that urgent private affairs required his presence in England. And it is more than probable that she would have achieved her object, had not her concluding sarcasm inspired him with a determination to work his vengeance upon her in a way that should make her rue the hour when she ventured to rouse his resentment.

"But I'll disappoint her," he muttered to himself, as he pondered in his locked chamber—"ay, and trample upon her when she implores for mercy. She taunted me with my birthright of ignominy. The time shall come when I will clothe her with shame, compared with which my disgrace shall appear honour. But how did

she learn it?—who told her?—do others know what I am?" And in the intensity of his anguish, the man nearly lost his consciousness, whilst the purple blood distended the veins of his head, and beads of sweat rolled down his face.

But the sharpest part of his punishment consisted of the self-scorn which the obvious sincerity and vehemence of Felicia Avalon's disgust at his wickedness had planted in his breast. Frivolous, selfish, absurdly vain though he was, the man was not utterly depraved. The time was when he could not have been fairly accused of lacking generosity; and a long career of ostentatious profligacy and secret meannesses had not altogether deprived him of the power to admire goodness. On marrying Fay Avalon, he had designed to turn over a new leaf, to reform, to become a moral character. It had even occurred to him to hope that, under his wife's influence, he might become a good and religious man. And whilst he cursed Felicia Avalon for her artifices and falsehood, he could not blind himself to the fact that she

was a noble, generous, pure creature, who, in her contemptuous repulse of his suit, had displayed the sentiments of scorn and repugnance which he merited, and which the knowledge of his uncleanness and treachery would necessarily rouse in every right-minded woman. This recognition of her goodness and his own despicableness—to his credit, be it said—hurt him even more than his vivid perception of the absurdity of his position. But though it filled him with remorse, it engendered in him no contrition. The more that he admired, by so much the more he detested, the cause of his anguish. In seeing her womanliness grow more bright and loveable, and his own turpitude become more black under the light which her anger had thrown on the one and the other, the miserable man realized something of the unutterable anguish of those accursed souls that, whilst lying in the horrors of hell, behold and yearn for the joys of the paradise from which they are excluded. It was alike consistent with the great evil and little good of his nature that he hated her *for* her loveliness, and desired to

make her as odious in appearance as he was in reality.

When a sleepless night had passed over his trouble, Joseph Tilbury confided to his young friend and professional subordinate, Frank Trevor, so much of his misfortunes as he knew it would be impossible for him to withhold from that sagacious and elegant youth. But he was, of course, careful to put his partial revelations in a form that would expose him as little as possible to the ridicule of the garrison, and secure for him the greatest possible amount of sympathy. Confining himself to an avowal of his rejection, he was silent concerning the reasons which had actuated Felicia Avalon, and he intimated that in her conduct to him she had merely obeyed the instincts of an utterly heartless coquette. He had been deucedly hard hit. The woman had only been making a fool of him, whilst she pretended to care for him, and lured him into her meshes. She was a wily siren, a cruel flirt, and she had cut him to the heart. He could not have believed in the existence of such baseness, perfidy, downright

indelicacy in the form of a woman. In refusing him, she laughed, flouted, jeered at him—had even mimicked his voice and manner, and derided the profession of which he was a member. But though she had proved herself a thorough she-devil, he could not help loving her still. He was a besotted, infatuated, contemptible fool for continuing to care about her; but he was no longer master of himself, and should never again be the man that he had been. He should, of course, have been warned by the fate of the other men who had proposed to her. But men in love are deaf to warnings, blind to reasons. But Joe Tilbury forgave her. He hoped no friend of his would speak an evil word of her. He should have maintained silence about the affair, had not the obligations of friendship required him to speak out frankly to the Dandy.

In reply to which confidential communications the Dandy was most sympathetic to his stricken friend, and most energetic in his expressions of disdain for the wily siren. He patted Joe on the shoulder, bade him keep his pecker up

and never say die, and suggested that they should get "leave" for a few days, and go up the country for some fishing, or run over to Macknay's in the Island of Orleans, where they could solace themselves with good eating and drinking at moderate charges. To which proposal Joe replied in the negative, with a stubborn fortitude worthy of his reputation for manliness. He was not going to turn tail and skulk, even for a day. He would face the ridicule of the affair, put a brave face on disaster, "show" about Quebec as though nothing had happened, and let Miss Circe see that she could not break his heart. Whereto Frank Trevor replied that Joe was a trump, and demeaned himself in a fashion that would command the respect of the whole garrison.

On leaving his stricken comrade, Dandy Trevor went off without delay to Mouse Ponsford, whom he found making silent war on his nervous system with a loaded meerschaum, and communicated the dismal tidings. The Mouse was not surprised to hear the news. It was a shame, an outrage, a barbarous crime ; he pitied poor

old Joe with all his heart ; he hoped that the whole garrison would make common cause with Joe, and agree that never an officer in Quebec should ask the flirt to dance at public assembly or private party ; but still he could not say that he was astonished at Miss Avalon's iniquity.

“Don’t you remember, Dandy, what I said to you yesterday morning ?” urged Lieutenant Maurice Ponsford, who, having for once surpassed his friend in sagacity, was properly desirous to get due credit for his acuteness. “I told you I didn’t like to hear of a girl’s having had a lot of offers. My very words were, ‘That sort of thing, you know, isn’t to a girl’s credit. It mayn’t mean vice, but it looks uncommonly like mischief !’ You remember I said so ? Come, now, bear me out as a friend should.”

Finding that the Mouse, who could at times be a troublesome customer, was bent on extorting an expression of assent, Frank Trevor reluctantly admitted that Maurice Ponsford, of the 49th, had delivered the sentiment in those precise words. “And,” added the Dandy, with a not uncommon dishonesty, “I

took exactly the same view of the woman's character."

"Not a bit of it, Dandy," warmly retorted Maurice, who fought for the originality of his opinion, as though it were a new patent contrivance of which he was the sole inventor, whilst the Dandy was a fraudulent craftsman, bent on infringing his right. "Come, none of that. It won't do. You expressly said that Miss Avalon was an exception to the rule."

"But I admitted the rule," urged the Dandy. "I accepted your principle. You were right for once."

"I should think I was! Why, hang me, if in this case it doesn't mean both mischief and vice."

"Granted. But don't be so arrogant. You were quite right—and I wasn't altogether wrong. Now, Mouse, I *have* known you sometimes altogether wrong."

His good-humour suddenly returning on this frank admission that he had seen through Miss Avalon from the beginning, and had not been "bamboozled by her flummery," the Mouse ex-

claimed, "There, Dandy, now you have done me justice like a friend. Now have a pipe. Whenever I am struck off my pins by a 'facer' I fall upon tobacco. My motto is, 'When in trouble, fill up!' So fill up with your Lat. co. Rose-leaves, or whatever other mild compound you are burning at the present moment. Ah! poor Joe should have stuck to the 'weed,' and left womankind alone."

"If he meant to do matrimonial business with womankind," observed the Dandy, "the dear old boy should have 'gone in' before he lost his figure."

"No doubt," Lieutenant Ponsford assented cordially, quick to recognize the merit of his comrade's critical sentiments, now that full justice had been rendered to his own. "But," he added, after a pause, "it's better for him as it is. He'll be happier without that baggage than he could ever have been with her."

"I don't know that," gloomily responded the Dandy. "He is awfully cut up, though he means to bear it like a man."

"Of course he'll bear it bravely. It would

not be like Joe to cave in, because he has had a facer."

"Poor old boy! he may fling away his waist-belt and Patent Hair-Restorer now."

"By Jove!" exclaimed the Mouse fiercely, "that woman's conduct is iniquitous!"

Before forty-eight hours had passed the whole garrison of Quebec—that is to say, the officers of it—took the same view of Miss Avalon's conduct. The Cavalry and Infantry, the Engineers and Artillery, were of one mind on the subject. She had behaved infamously. She was a "bad lot," a "dangerous woman," a "petticoated betrayer."

Expressions of sympathy flowed in upon the petticoated betrayer's victim. The Mouse presented him with a tribute of affection in the shape of a big meerschaum, with the legend, "When in trouble, fill up!" chased on its silver fitting. The Dandy insisted that he and dear old Joe should be photographed together on the same card, in attitudes calculated to do justice to their figures. Colonel Protheroe begged the victim to accept an Albert watch-guard of massive

gold. And in the course of ten days the military sympathy and enthusiasm for Joe Tilbury rose to such a point that the garrison decided to give him a little dinner at "Macknay's on the Island."

Joseph Tilbury was precisely one of those popular and manly fellows to whom men like to give dinners and exalt as mahogany-tree heroes on the slightest possible provocation. And, in the Major's case, it was not difficult to discover a suitable pretext for feeding him in a hot room, and proclaiming him with uproarious melody a "jolly good fellow." As Honorary Secretary of the Quebec Garrison Race Association, he had done unpaid service to the officers quartered on Cape Diamond; and nothing could be more reasonable than that the gentlemen who had profited by his secretarial ability should give him a dinner and a piece of plate—no exorbitantly expensive thing in the way of a tea-pot, but a substantial though modest memorial of the regard in which he was held. A committee was formed, who struck the iron while it was hot, and made themselves temporary owners in

trust of the tallest of the three challenge-cups that had stood for the last twelvemonth in the window of Gadsby's shop in St. Lewis Street.

Hence it came to pass that, whilst Felicia Avalon's singular treatment of Major Tilbury was the pet topic of every drawing-room of Quebec, Joseph Curtain Tilbury was entertained at a complimentary dinner by all the officers of the garrison, and presented with a metallic "expression of the respect cherished by his friends for his soldier-like qualities and uniform manliness."

That Felicia Avalon heard with satisfaction of this compliment to her discarded suitor, the readers of this history are not likely to suppose. Instead of driving her enemy from Quebec, she experienced the mortification of knowing that her treatment of him had rendered him more popular than ever. And this was a bitter mortification to the woman who had prided herself on her popularity in her native city quite as much as Major Tilbury prided himself on his popularity in the army. Though, of course, no public allusion was made to her by

the givers of the Tilbury testimonial; and though the Major's friends professed that they were merely acknowledging in a usual manner his services to the Race Club, she was acutely sensitive of the significance of the demonstration. To her it was a declaration that, in the opinion of a considerable and very influential section of the society of Quebec, she had been guilty of falsehood, heartlessness, and unwomanliness.

CHAPTER XIII.

“THE MOTHER COUNTRY.”

BUT though he found many consolers, Major Tilbury derived no adequate consolation from their kindness. It was, of course, a relief to escape the ridicule which he had apprehended, and to know that, instead of diminishing his popularity, Felicia Avalon's repudiation of his addresses had for the moment raised him to the rank of a social hero. It was positively agreeable to him to see that, instead of looking coldly on him, society was disposed to resent his wrongs, even to the point of exclaiming openly against the woman who had aimed at covering him with discredit. But these mitigations of calamity were no compensation for the sufferings which wounded vanity, despised

love, and consciousness of shame inflicted upon him. Fay Avalon's exhibition of derisive contempt for his powers of fascination was of itself an offence calculated to fire him with relentless enmity. Her manifestation of disgust at his passion and his nature was an outrage which the courtesies of his male friends could not wipe from his recollection. The scorn of her allusion to his vicious origin was an indignity which, had she been a man, he would have avenged with murder. Since she was a woman, he resolved to avenge it by murdering her reputation, and driving her in ignominy from the community whose respect and love were dear to her above all her other possessions.

This being the resolve on the execution of which he meant to exert every faculty of a mind which Felicia Avalon had discerned to be by no means deficient in natural strength and shrewdness, his animosity against his petticoated adversary was not assuaged by the contents of a parcel which arrived in his hands from England some three or four weeks after his last visit to the Fairmead.

The packet contained a letter from one of his London friends, Ned Canton, already mentioned in these pages, and an early copy of a new novel in three volumes—"The Mother Country," by the author of "Marjory Gatkin; Sketches of High Life in a British-American Colony," and published by Messrs. Hobson and Holliday, 15, Sackville Street, Piccadilly, London. The packet contained also several pages of soiled and scored MS.

Ned Canton's letter was in the following words:—

" 8, Pump Court, Temple.

" DEAR JOE,

" Only three minutes for a line or two. Mail starts to-night, and business urgent. You are right in your suspicions. 'Marjory Gatkin' was written by the woman you wot of; and since you wish for a specimen of her handwriting, I send you some sheets of her copy. All the MS. of 'Marjory' is in my hands, it having come to me together with proofs from the printers. I revised the lady's sketches for publication, and nursed them through the press.

Of course, I make this communication under strict seal ; and you must be careful to keep your knowledge to yourself, as the fair author is especially desirous to remain incog. So be cautious, and don't blow the gaff on our charming friend until you have marital authority to do what you like with her reputation and—earnings. The said earnings, by the way, are likely to be considerable. 'Marjory Gatkin' had a stunning good sale. H. and H. netted £1,476 by the sale, and have astounded her by their munificence in paying her £500 for 'The Mother Country,' which would be dirt cheap at a thousand. If our 'green hand' fulfils her promise, she will be worth £1,000 to £1,500 a year for a long time to any husband who knows how to use her. When she is yours, don't make the common mistake of urging her to overwork herself. Feed her on poetry, the fine arts, and agreeable assurances that she is influencing her generation ; give her a continental trip every autumn ; let her have pin-money in reason, and pocket the balance, which will be tidy. As for me, my fortune is scarcely equal to my deserts,

but not bad enough to steep me in gloom. Hack-work buoyant, journalism yielding satisfactory returns, connection increasing. On the other hand, card-account for the last twelve months indicates loss of capital; and Miss Lalage, of Minerva Cottage, Brompton, is more extravagant and imperious than ever. Old Hobson is as vigorous as ever, takes his port with no apparent injury to his constitution, and has not at present declared his intention to make me his heir.

“Yours sincerely and effusively,

“NED CANTON.”

The sight of the quire of soiled pages on which Felicia Avalon had written the opening chapters of “Majory Gatkin” afforded manifest satisfaction to Major Tilbury, who, after glancing curiously over their contents, subjected the author’s handwriting to the closest scrutiny.

“Good!” he said, when he had locked the scored and disfigured sheets, together with Ned Canton’s letter, in the secret drawer of the massive writing-desk that had seen service at

Malta and Gibraltar before coming out to Canada ; “ they will be useful—very useful—all the more so because they are written in a masculine style, designed, doubtless, to create an impression that they were indited by a man. They show me what she would do, if she set to work to disguise her handwriting. And now for ‘ The Mother Country.’ Let me see, who was the ancient author who observed, ‘ Oh ! that mine enemy would write a book ! ’ Happily, Joe Tilbury, it may be thy fate to re-echo that sentiment. As I am no professional reviewer, I may as well cut the pages of my dear Felicia’s volumes, and read them before passing judgment on them.”

Whereupon Major Tilbury cut the pages of the three volumes; and, having so prepared them for perusal, he proceeded forthwith to ascertain the contents of a novel about which something must be said for the benefit of readers who have neglected to print upon their memories one of the best works of fiction that may be found on Mr. Mudie’s shelves.

In “ The Mother Country,” Miss Avalon had

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endeavoured to produce a story that should tell readers on both sides of the Atlantic some wholesome truths respecting the political and social relations of Great Britain and her American dependencies. Whilst reproving the colonists of the higher classes for their propensity to exhibit an almost servile respect for the social opinion of London, and urging them to feel in their colonial birth the same pride that natives of the mother country took in their insular origin, she endeavoured to show the evil that ensued to England from the frivolous demeanour and licentious conduct occasionally observable in the persons who, born in England, and representing the authority of the imperial government, came out to the colonies to occupy more or less important posts in them. That the work betrayed the author's pride in her colony, and even indicated a preference for it over the parent-land, the reader may infer from the strong and absolutely romantic attachment which Felicia Avalon cherished for Canada; but to show that it was in no way deficient in loyalty to the throne and devotion to the en-

tire empire, it is enough to say that its political sentiments were precisely those which Foxe Avalon had inculcated in his children, and that the book overflowed with patriotic enthusiasm. That the tale achieved its end perfectly, or that its symmetry was not affected injuriously by those of its parts which were specially written for the accomplishment of its politico-social objects, I cannot represent. Political novels are frequently popular, but they are almost always defective from purely artistic points of view. Novels with a moral purpose are usually infelicitous in proportion to the magnitude of the efforts made by their writers to improve the morals of the public. And, though I wish to speak favourably of Miss Avalon's literary performances, which are unquestionably of high excellence, I am of opinion that "The Mother Country" would have been a much more agreeable book if the writer had kept her political sentiments to herself, and had been content to amuse the people whom she endeavoured to instruct and edify.

But the story was powerful and deeply inter-

esting. Although overweighted with homily and social essay, it raised the anonymous author's reputation for humour; and the critics concurred in extolling the force observable in the delineation of Colonel Congreve's ludicrous vanity and repulsive nature. Even greater skill and cleverness were allowed to be shown in the portraiture of Maud Henderson, the colonial girl, who, after conceiving sentiments of friendship for the Colonel, regarded him with repugnance and vindictive enmity, on receiving conclusive proof of his barbarous perfidy to Fanny Hartlibb, the poor creature whom he reduced to infamy, at the very time when he ventured to range himself amongst the number of Maud's suitors. The story of Fanny's ruin was told with exquisite delicacy, and yet with a most minute enumeration of all the odious artifices of her destroyer. The whole romantic fiction of English literature contains nothing more simple in language and overpoweringly pathetic than the chapters which describe her sickness and penitential death. There is no need to recapitulate the facts of a tragedy—or, it may be, of a melo-

drama—with which the reader is already sufficiently familiar. In her relations with Colonel Congreve, and her goodness to Fanny, Maud Henderson played in fiction a part very similar to that which Felicia Avalon had actually performed towards Major Tilbury and Millicent Lacroix. The utterances put by the writer's art in the lips of the dying girl—her prayers for her own forgiveness, and far more fervent and thrilling supplications that her betrayer should also be forgiven—were the very utterances which Millicent Lacroix had delivered whilst death stood over her with outstretched hand. They were, also, the very words which the wretched peruser of “The Mother Country”—reading the story throughout one entire, long, sleepless night, in his lodging in the Artillery Barracks of Quebec—seemed to hear in clear, penetrating, plaintive notes of damning gentleness, spoken by the very voice of the murdered girl. As his eyes looked on the clear fresh type which impressed those awful words on his soul as distinctly as they had been marked upon the white paper, he shivered with horror at the enormity

of his wickedness, and groaned under the superstitious fancy that the sheets on which he looked were the very chart of indictment that would be read out to him at the day of judgment.

Maud Henderson was no piece of biographic portraiture, but a character differing in nearly every minor detail from her delineator. She had none of the personal distinctions of her artistic creator. Instead of being the daughter of an English officer, she was the child of a Canadian merchant of colonial birth; and save that she was represented as moving in the best society of Quebec—the city of the story's drama—her domestic position and story bore no resemblance to those of Miss Avalon. She was no possessor of great accomplishments and unusual talents, but a woman whose influence depended mainly on intellectual and moral qualifications that certainly were absent from Felicia's most distinctive endowments. But though the author had been at great pains to save herself from the charge of making herself the heroine of her own literary performance, should the authorship of the book ever become known,

there were one or two grand traits in which she and Maud resembled each other. As the type of the true Canadian woman, Maud cherished for her colony and native city the same love that was known to be one of Felicia's strongest sentiments. Moreover, Maud was so constituted that it was almost consistent with her character to act in some respects towards Colonel Congreve precisely as Felicia had acted towards Major Tilbury. Though she was not described as luring the Colonel to an avowal of love and an offer of marriage, in order that she might give him a humiliating rejection, she was made to rejoice in her ability to treat her suitor, on the occasion of his proposal to her, very much as Felicia treated the Major. Just as Felicia avenged Millicent Lacroix's wrongs by her crushing repulse of Major Tilbury, Maud avenged Fanny Hartlibb by a similar repudiation of Colonel Congreve's suit. In this particular the story corresponded so precisely with the drama of real life that even the writer's cleverness scarcely succeeded in making Maud's conduct to her abominated suitor appear altogether in har-

mony with her general gentleness and modesty.

But if Felicia Avalon had taken especial pains to disguise the original of Maud Henderson from readers who, though living in Quebec, would not know all the particulars of her relations with Major Tilbury, she had depicted Colonel Congreve's original with photographic exactness. As he read "The Mother Country," Joseph Tilbury had the pleasure of seeing himself portrayed in Colonel Congreve, so that, even had the episode of Fanny Hartlibb's ruin been omitted from the book, he could not have failed to recognize himself in the vain, garrulous, swaggering, underbred Colonel. Before revealing the darkest and most hateful qualities of this garrison roisterer, the author made excellent fun for her readers by laughing at his affectations and clumsy coxcombies, his propensity for telling old jokes, and his anxiety to conceal the marks which time had set in his appearance. There was no defective point in the effeminately vain man's aspect and address that was not rendered exquisitely ludicrous by the satirist of Colonel Congreve. He had no secret weakness

or hidden folly which Felicia did not prove herself to have detected by the ridicule that her pen poured on the Colonel. In the earlier part of the story the Colonel figured as the successful military cad, thinly veneered with gentility; the development of the plot showed him to be a villain varnished with such conventional decency as must cover the outside of every man presuming to associate with gentlemen; towards the close of the story he was the same villain, with all the varnish scraped off. In short, Major Tilbury had the novel excitement of being exhibited to himself as a peculiarly offensive type of the Englishmen who tend to render England odious and contemptible in the eyes of our colonists. Such an exhibition was not agreeable to the individual who had assumed an air of superiority to colonial society. It was all the more painful to his self-love because he was compelled to see that the picture was no caricature, but a veritable portraiture; that the woman who lashed him so cruelly did him no injustice.

Had the date of the publication of "The

Mother Country" permitted the supposition, Joseph Tilbury would have thought that the scene of Colonel Congreve's rejection by Maud Henderson had been written since the day when Felicia Avalon dismissed him from her presence. Forbidden by obvious facts to take this view of the most offensive part of the novel, the Major was not slow in discerning from it that the author of the book had with her pen drawn out the plan of her final battle with him, and in due course had amused herself by faithfully carrying out the hostile programme. The case was so. Felicia had already written the opening chapters of the story on a design that Colonel Congreve should play the villain's *rôle*, when Millicent's betrayal came to her knowledge and furnished her with the saddest incidents of the narrative. In her indignation against the helpless girl's destroyer, she first imagined the romantic punishment of his wickedness; and having found relief in the imaginary chastisement of the offender, she conceived the purpose of rendering the conception a thing of actual occurrence. The story had been completed,

sent to the London publishers, and put in type, when the artist had the satisfaction of putting into practice her artistic notion of a suitable punishment for such a revolting delinquent. Even in the excitement of her last conversation with Major Tilbury, she had diverted herself with rendering the interview as far as possible a close and literal performance of the scene in the unpublished novel. The same sarcasms which she had put into Maud's mouth she had repeated with practised accent in her own drawing-room to the man whom she loathed.

In one respect, however, there was an important difference between the fictitious scene and the scene of real life. It was a considerable relief to the Major's wounded sensibilities to discover that "The Mother Country" contained no allusion to the ignominy of his birth. In this particular Felicia Avalon, with the pen in her hand, had been no less true to her own womanliness, and generous to her foe, than she would have been by word of mouth, had not fury gained momentary possession of her better self under the irritation of his exasperating presence.

Having, through Ned Canton's promptitude, obtained a copy of "The Mother Country" before another copy of the work had arrived in America, Major Tilbury had time to peruse the novel several times, and resolve deliberately as to the course which it would be prudent for him to take respecting its contents, before the next mail from England brought out papers calling attention to "the new story by the author of 'Marjory Gatkin.'" And during that interval he came to prudent conclusions concerning the narrative, which he kept under lock and key at his quarters.

"As soon as I see signs that the people here identify me with the Colonel," Joseph Tilbury thought within himself, "I will transgress Ned Canton's injunctions, and 'blow the gaff' on my fascinating enemy. When they have once detected me in Congreve, the men of the garrison will not be slow to suspect who is my anonymous assailant, and like an honest, good-natured fellow, I will assist their suspicions to the truth. After all, the book won't hurt me much more than I am hurt already. As

for Fanny Hartlibb and her business, I shall cause my enthusiastic friends to regard that matter as a vile attempt to asperse me with odious slander; and my friends, knowing little or nothing about that monstrously ugly affair with Millie, will take my part against the calumniator who has begun the odious business of disseminating libels under the forms of romantic fiction. Moreover, they will be quick to regard the novel as a malignant endeavour to cover the whole military profession with obloquy. Fellows are always ready 'to go it hot against anonymous traducers of honourable gentlemen.' Oh! Jezebel, confound you, it's war to the knife, is it? And you have been flattering yourself that the chances are all on your side? You'll find yourself mistaken, madam. The chances are on mine; for you will fight with pure steel, while I shall cut you with a poisoned blade. If you have the town with you, I have the garrison; and many weeks shall not pass before you shall see your dear 'colonials' dropping off from you. You are an anonymous author, an anonymous calumniator! It won't

be difficult for me to make the world believe strangely horrible things of a female manufacturer of libels. Wait awhile, and your dear friends of Quebec, whom you love so much that you can't endure the thought of leaving them —shall cease to be your dear friends. You taunted me with my mother's profligacy, did you? By my mother's shame, I'll crush you, madam; and make you such a creature that no son of yours shall ever be proud of you!"

And whilst the man communed with himself thus amiably and generously, a privileged observer would have seen in the sternness of a once handsome face, and the hardening lines of a battered visage, conclusive proof that, notwithstanding the frivolousness of his past career, Major Tilbury was capable of resoluteness,—capable of persisting with unyielding steadfastness in a course of diabolical cruelty.

CHAPTER XIV.

RESTING AT "THE CHAUMONTS' FARM."

WHILST Major Tilbury was nursing his wrath against Felicia, and laying plans for her social perdition, she was living in seclusion at the Chaumonts' farm in the neighbourhood of the St. Anne's Falls, and enjoying the scenery of one of the boldest and most picturesque districts within five-and-twenty or thirty miles of Quebec.

The Chaumonts' farm—so called from the name of the French family that have possessed it for a hundred and fifty years—is a place that she had been accustomed from childhood to visit, whenever Dr. Renouf prescribed for her health change of air and residence in the country. The Fairmead, though fixed in a suburb of

Quebec, was so perfectly rural that it might be thought that its inhabitants would never have felt it desirable to seek country air elsewhere; but no place is so charming and healthy as to satisfy the requirements of those who can command the means of spending periodical holidays in another locality. And the Chaumonts was the spot which Felicia had been educated to regard as the most delightful of earthly retreats. It was the abode where Marie Messurier had spent many a week of her childhood; and Felicia loved it as an almost sacred harbour, in consideration of its associations with her mother's memory. The Chaumonts, simple but refined specimens of French *habitans*, were distant and humble kinsmen of the aristocratic Messuriers; people too well placed in the world to condescend to take ordinary lodgers beneath their roof, though highly pleased to entertain their wealthy relatives who, without offending their cousin's feelings, could pay for their board and lodging at the Farm with handsome presents. Throughout his long widowhood Foxe Avalon was an annual visitor at the Chau-

monts' farm, where he had encountered *Marie Messurier* for the first time. It was the Colonel's head-quarters whenever he shot snipe and wild-duck in the marshes about *Ange Gardieu* and *Château Richer*; and amongst the means which the Colonel employed, with some scepticism, it must be confessed, for the restoration of his afflicted boy, was the water of those springs of *St. Anne*, that are believed by the superstitious denizens of the surrounding region to possess sanative powers for every malady that human flesh is heir to. Amongst the crutches exhibited on the walls of *St. Anne's* church as memorials of marvellous cures achieved by the saint, may be seen those which *Felix* relinquished at the threshold of manhood.

Happier hours *Felicia Avalon* had, no doubt, spent in this seclusion in former years; but never had the tranquillity of the Farm and the beauties of the neighbourhood afforded her more refreshment than they did on the occasion of this last residence in a beloved locality. Coming from the unusual heat of *Quebec*, that had exhausted her physical powers no less com-

pletely than the peculiar agitations of a memorable crisis in her life had broken her spirits, she experienced for the first time in her life that luxury of repose which the very young seldom derive from intercourse with nature. For months she had been overtaxing her powers by literary labour and imprudent indulgence in the social diversions of the city. The excitements that accrued to her from the startling success of her first book, and the poignancy of her secret sorrow for poor little Millicent Lacroix, had already done much to shatter her nerves, when pangs of remorse for the unwomanly violence of her conduct to Major Tilbury, and distressing apprehensions of evil results from her rash demeanour, reduced her to a condition of ill-health that rendered change of scene a necessity for her. Before Dr. Renouf ordered her off to the Chaumonts' farm, Felix had decided that not another week should elapse ere he carried her off to their choice resting-place. The exclamations of joy and gratitude that escaped from her lips as the big bay horse closed a fatiguing journey by dragging her carriage

slowly up the narrow road past St. Anne's church, satisfied Felix that he had taken the best course for her recovery. "This pure, quiet, blessed, lovely place!" she exclaimed, as tears of subduing joy came into her eyes. "In three days I shall be strong again, and at peace in my heart."

And so far as outward signs indicated the state of her feelings, the remedy gave her serenity and contentment in less than that time.

At the farm, when her brother had returned to Quebec after a night's rest, she enjoyed the solitude for which she yearned. The parlour of the homestead was her private sitting-room, which her hostess—old Madame Chaumont, a prim, cleanly, taciturn body—never cared to enter, unless her guest specially invited her to do so. Her large, airy bedroom, furnished with antique furniture, commanded a superb view of rock and cataract, glen and forest; and as she lay in bed the fresh air came to her from the valley, laden with the perfumes of a contiguous garden. Besides Felicia and the two female servants of the farm, Madame Chaumont,

incessantly busy in her dairy and kitchen, was the only woman in the establishment. The other members of the family—Michel Chaumont, his two sons, and the two male helps—were out upon the farm from early morn till late evening; so that Sunday was the only day in the week when Felicia found an opportunity to exchange sociable words with the three farmers, who, notwithstanding their clannish affection for “the Colonel’s daughter,” and their approval of her pleasant address, were too shy in her company, and too much in awe of so elegant and stately a lady, to weary her with too much of their society on the day of rest. Felicia was therefore at liberty to enjoy her loneliness, and she made the most of the privilege.

She sauntered about the village, when agricultural labour had taken its inhabitants from their dwellings. Entering the church, she inspected the votive tablets and reliques, and amongst them her brother’s discarded crutches, and the inscribed marble that recorded Foxe Avalon’s thankfulness for his cure. Now from this point and now from that, now reclining on

a green bank in the valley, and now perched upon a ledge of rock on the height, she feasted her eyes on the dazzling whiteness of the tumbling rapids, and caught to her soul the exquisite harmonies faintly audible beneath the tumultuous roar of the never-resting cataracts. At other times she sauntered in the woods, where the voices of birds, the hum of insects, or the quick steps of frightened animals, were the loudest interruptions of the tranquillizing stillness. Or she would sit for an hour at a time on the large garden-chair, under the big pear-tree in the Chaumonts' garden, watching the autumnal purple and crimson deepen upon the sides of the glen.

After deriving from her retirement all the benefits which she had hoped to gain from the change of scene and circumstance, Fay Avalon protracted her sojourn at the Chaumonts' farm for several weeks, under the influence of increasing delight in the beauties of the country, and of a nervous apprehension that a return to the Fairmead would be injurious to her spirits. Once a week Felix drove over from Quebec and passed

a night at the farm; and when Fay had spent three weeks in seclusion, Miss Messurier journeyed from the city to St. Anne's Falls, and became the companion of her grand-niece for a full fortnight. Ten days having elapsed since Aunt Messurier's return to Quebec, Felix took up his abode at the Chaumonts', where he had made arrangements to pass his customary autumn holiday of a clergyman's fortnight. Felicia Avalon, therefore, was not left too much to herself, though solitariness was the prevailing condition of her happy existence in the household on the hill.

And the restful solitude, broken by occasional society, and relieved by agreeable news from the great world beyond her retreat, was a delicious and invigorating experience to the sensitive and thoughtful woman, who passed much of her companionless time in exercising the art of the painter in water-colours, and an equal portion of her leisure in reading letters and newspapers, or in meditating a scheme for another literary enterprise. English papers informed her that "The Mother Country" was

regarded in London as a worthy sequel to "Marjory Gatkin;" and critics on both sides of the Atlantic encouraged the anonymous author to persevere in a vocation for which she had shown herself to possess special faculties. More than once Felix had suggested that he should like to have her back again at the Fairmead; and as often Fay, with unaccustomed selfishness, had been wilfully deaf to his intimations. Some nervous instinct, some vague prevision of coming disaster, warned her to delay her return to Quebec, as a movement that would be fraught with disappointments and vexations to her. And yet, in spite of this undercurrent of undefinable fear, she was happy in her employments, her meditations, and her plans for the future. During the last three weeks of her stay at the farm, she seldom thought of Major Tilbury, or of those incidents of their intercourse on which she could not reflect without blushing for herself.

At length, however, the time came when the return could no longer be delayed. Felix had made his last journey over from the Fairmead

for the purpose of conveying her back to Quebec; and the carriage for her homeward journey was standing at the door of the farm-house, laden with her luggage, of which the most valuable item in her eyes was the folio of sketches, executed in her peculiar style of brilliant and audacious colouring, that were destined to be lost in a catastrophe which the future had in store for her.

“Good-bye, dear Madame Chaumont; many, many thanks to you for all the kindness you have shown to me!” Fay Avalon exclaimed, as she pressed her lips to the bronzed cheek of her landlady, with that cordial affectionateness and absence of petty pride that made her popular with the humbler people of Quebec, and caused Nora MacCarthy to maintain that Miss Avalon of the Fairmead was just the sweetest-tempered cratur that the Lord had ever put in shoe-leather.

Fay had another kiss—one no less cordial, though less effusive, than her parting salute to Madame—for Madame’s husband; and, having thus warmly paid her adieux to her host and

hostess, she gave “Cousin Henri” and “Cousin Francois” such a hearty grip to the hand, and such an irradiating smile, that after watching Fay Avalon’s carriage till it was out of sight, those shy and awkward young French-Canadians went off to their farm-work, pleasantly regarding themselves as no ordinary fellows, since they had for a cousin so superb and queenly a woman as “the Colonel’s daughter.”

The setting sun was illuminating the tinned roofs of Quebec, and clothing them with a glittering brightness when, towards the close of one of those delicious days which the Canadians look for in the beginning of November—during the “Indian summer;” the Canadian equivalent of our “St. Luke’s little summer”—Fay Avalon returned to her native city, after her prolonged sojourn at the farm near the Falls.

Another half-hour, and her carriage turned into the Fairmead gate, betwixt trees utterly stripped of the crimson leaves that a few weeks earlier had given them the brilliant gorgeousness which no words can bring with adequate vividness before the imagination of the reader who has never

exulted over the blazing splendours of the Canadian autumn.

“Here we are, Fay, back again,” Felix exclaimed, joyfully, as he leaped from the carriage, and prepared to assist his sister to alight —“back again at our happy home.”

“God grant that it may still be our happy home!” Fay implored, mentally, as the blackness of profound melancholy leaped upon her with terrifying suddenness.

CHAPTER XV.

SOCIETY DISAPPROVES OF THE AVALONS.

MANY days had not passed after their return from the Falls when Felix and his sister were informed by several significant circumstances that some influence was at work that tended to lower them in the regard of their fellow-citizens, and even to beget coldness between them and several of their oldest and most familiar friends.

Though he had not been long in priest's orders, Felix had acquired considerable reputation as a popular preacher, and had drawn to his church, in a humble quarter of the city, several families that had their residences in distant and fashionable localities. Partly because he was "Foxe Avalon's boy," and partly be-

cause they appreciated rightly the earnestness of his delivery and the excellence of his sermons, some of the principal personages of Quebec had relinquished their sittings in the Protestant cathedral, and become regular members of his congregation, very much to the gratification of the young man, who had taken possession of his pulpit with some fear that he should experience the proverbial fate of prophets daring enough to prophesy in their own country.

Of course it was vexatious to him to see these extra-parochial adherents fall away from him, and resume their former places in the chief church. It was yet more painful to him to remark that some of the principal Church of England residents in his district withdrew from his congregation. How was he to account for this change? There had been no disturbance at school-meeting or vestry-meeting to which the manifest ill-feeling could be attributed. He had changed in no particular since his popularity was complete. He had been just as assiduous as ever in the performance of his duties,

and certainly had given utterance to no opinions that were calculated to offend his people. What distressed him even more than the signs of disaffection was the frigid reserve which he encountered whenever he tried to ascertain from the deserters their reason for withdrawing from his church.

“What can this mean, Mr. Mangrove?” he inquired frankly of his churchwarden, a tall, pompous, phlegmatic man, for whom, in spite of several disagreeable qualities, Felix entertained much respect.

“It means, sir,” said Mr. Mangrove, “that some of your old hearers don’t wish to sit under you any longer.”

“But why don’t they wish to remain in my congregation?”

“It must be, sir, because they are disposed to go elsewhere.”

“But, my dear Mr. Mangrove, they must have discovered some grounds for looking upon me with positive disapprobation. Can’t you do me the great service of telling me how I have unconsciously offended them?”

“Surely, sir, it would be better for you to ask them yourself.”

“I have asked them,” responded Felix, with depression and annoyance that he had no motive for concealing, “and they repulse me as you do.”

With an irritating accession of pomposity, Mr. Mangrove rejoined, “Then it would ill-become me, sir, in my official position, to gossip about their opinions, which it is clear they wish to keep to themselves.”

The next morning, the Reverend Felix Avalon found on his breakfast-table the following note from his churchwarden, who lived within a stone’s throw of the young clergyman’s church, and more than a mile from the Anglican Cathedral:—

“The General Stores,
“Dauphine Street, Quebec.

“REVEREND SIR,

“In consequence of circumstances with respect to which I am advised not to make any precise statement, I have determined, after much deliberation and searching of my conscience, to separate myself and family from

your congregation, and to attend the services of the Cathedral Church. On the expiration of my present year of office, I therefore trust that you will provide yourself with another occupant of the office to which you paid me the compliment of inviting

“Your very obedient servant, .

“JONAS MANGROVE.”

“What can it mean?” exclaimed Felix, repeating to his sister the question that he had put on the previous day to the stately Mr. Mangrove.

“We must have an enemy,” Felicia observed in a low voice.

“Yes, an enemy hath done this thing,” assented Felix, in a tone particularly afflicting to his sister, whose conscience had suggested to her that the unknown enemy might prove to be herself.

On the evening of the same day, Felix and his sister attended the first of the Winter Assemblies at Payne’s Hotel, in the Place d’Armes, to which of course the Assemblies’ Com-

mittee had sent them the ordinary tickets of admission. It was an unusually brilliant and crowded assembly; and for the first time in her life Felicia spent an evening in a ball-room without being solicited on all sides by persons wishing to dance with her. She did not dance more than five times during the entire entertainment, and her partners, though gentlemen of respectability, were not persons of the best position. The officers of the garrison were present in full force, but no one of them asked her to dance. It was, of course, obvious that she was cut by the garrison; that the officers of all the services resented her rejection of Major Tilbury, and were bent on "putting her down." Yet worse, by the favour exhibited to Major Tilbury by the ladies of every "set" in Quebec, it was obvious that he had risen in social esteem as much as she had fallen. There were other signs that the animosity against her was not confined to military circles. Poor old Miss Messurier, on duty as her niece's chaperon, was in a fume and fret, until the arrival of the Fairmead carriage put an end to the sharpest

part of her punishment. "What have you been doing to make yourself shunned?" the aged gentlewoman inquired with startling vehemence so soon as she had taken her place in her carriage. "Some mad freak of yours, Felicia, has rendered you notorious?"

Leaving the exasperated lady at her house in the town, Felix and his sister returned to their suburb, and did not exchange twenty words, until they were once again within the walls of the Fairmead.

"Is there a good fire in the library, Martha?" were Felicia's first words, when she had re-entered the house, on which the snow was falling.

"A good fire," Martha answered.

"Then be off to bed, nursie. Your master and I are going to have a chat; and, as we shall be late, I won't keep you up."

Not a little surprised at the unexpected dismissal, Martha retired; and as soon as she had disappeared, her mistress said quickly, "Come into the library, Felix; I must make a confession to you before I go to bed. You must

know all. I have been very wrong to have secrets from you."

Whereupon Felix followed her into the library, and having closed the door of the apartment, seated himself before the blazing fire.

"Put an end to my astonishment and perplexity as quickly as possible," he entreated, "for, you may believe me, they are very painful."

Without delay Fay Avalon, having seated herself midway between the fire and the lamp that stood on the library table, told him the whole story of her treatment of Major Tilbury, not omitting the particulars of the suffering and death of Millicent Lacroix. Reserving nothing of the truth, which it caused her inexpressible embarrassment and shame to reveal, she told him all the facts respecting her intercourse with the man whose influence, she had no doubt, was the cause of the slights she had endured at the Assembly.

As she uttered the last words of her confession, a burning blush imparted to her delicate cheek and grand countenance a glow that,

in spite of its intensity, was strangely beautifying ; and ere the colour had passed away, her agitation was increased by the startling enthusiasm with which her auditor declared his admiration of the conduct that threatened to occasion both of them enduring trouble.

“ You noble, glorious Fay !” the young man exclaimed, after he had risen from his chair, and taken up his position where he could smooth his darling’s dark tresses, and, whilst thus stroking her into composure, could kiss her forehead.

“ Don’t, don’t forgive me,” the woman entreated, as though she were a school-girl, and Felix her father, “ till you have scolded me. I have behaved impetuously, wrongly, wickedly. I have brought disgrace on myself, and compromised you. I thought only of myself and my own indignation, when I persuaded myself that I was avenging grandly the wrongs perpetrated against the dead girl; and when, instead of giving rein to my resentment, I ought to have reflected how my action would affect you.”

“ Nonsense, darling ! Don’t fret about the

disagreeable consequences of your righteous behaviour. You have done grandly, Fay—oh, gloriously!—and if your action is destined to bring some trivial annoyances upon me, I shall think them a cheap price to pay for the chastisement which you have inflicted on that unutterable rascal! My instinctive repugnance to the fellow is justified."

"But you shan't suffer, Felix," Fay cried, impetuously. "The world is on his side now, because it knows nothing of his atrocious conduct. I am not afraid of him, now that you have forgiven me; and since it can do poor Millie Lacroix no harm now to publish her tale of woe, it shall be published more precisely than it is narrated in "The Mother Country." Rather than let him escape the infamy which he merits, I will avow myself the author of that work, and tell the world that he is the real Colonel Congreve, and that I humiliated him because he murdered Millicent with false words and vile deeds."

"You must do no such thing," Felix interposed, gravely.

“Why not?”

“Rely on my judgment now,” Felix urged, with increasing seriousness.

“Yes, yes, dear, I will be obedient. Don’t fear that I will be headstrong again, or bring more trouble on you by fresh folly.”

“How can you prove your accusations against him?”

“Millicent told me—on her death-bed.”

“Ay, on her death-bed. She is no longer alive to demonstrate his guilt by testimony that he could not upset.”

“She told her aunt, too.”

“No doubt; but he can reply to you and her aunt, ‘Either through the art of her betrayer, or such mental disturbance as frequently ensues on the commission of the crime which she acknowledged herself to have committed, the unhappy girl was the victim of delusion.’ He would not question the accuracy of your report of the girl’s words. It would be enough for him to say that the girl’s words were false—none the less untrue because they imposed on you and a near female relative.”

“Why, Felix, I saw the letters he wrote to her.”

“Have you copies of them?”

“No.”

“And you returned the originals to him?”

Fay Avalon’s countenance fell. She saw at once the shrewdness and justice of her brother’s view of Major Tilbury’s position ; and even in the chagrin which the new discovery occasioned her, she admired the clearness of her brother’s observation, and the conciseness of the language in which he had demonstrated her inability to fix on Major Tilbury the obloquy of his crime.

“We must be quiet, and act as though the change in the world’s demeanour did not greatly affect us. Many unpleasantnesses may come to us from this awkward affair ;—we must endure them with composure and dignity. Slander may for a brief while withdraw from us the affection of our friends ;—our lives must discredit the evil reports ; we must live calumny down, and vanquish our enemy by righteous behaviour.”

“But, darling, brave Felix, it is so hard that

you should suffer on account of my indiscretion and folly."

"I shan't suffer much through them," Felix put in stoutly, "though it is possible that Major Tilbury will try to damage me, in order that he may make you repent your splendid scorn of him. And, mind you, Fay," he added, in another tone, "I have yet to ascertain that the disturbance in my congregation is due to their disapprobation of you, or their sympathy for this profligate soldier. How our father, Fay, abhorred the fellows of whom this disgusting man is a specimen!"

"There can be nothing else to account for the behaviour of your congregation."

"It is incredible that my people have no better reason for drawing away from me than sympathy with Major Tilbury—than interest in the love-affairs of an officer of whom they know nothing more creditable than that he is a good heavy-weight steeplechase rider. Depend upon it, my dear, there is some mischief brewing that we have not discovered at present. Perhaps I have been guilty of some foolhardiness, and in

a fortnight's time shall find myself bound to repay your confidence with a corresponding confession of error. I have not, that I am aware of, incensed any young lady by forbearing to make her an offer."

"Don't laugh, Felix; this is no laughing matter," Fay entreated.

"I won't cry over these transient troubles, if I can have my will. Of course we have good reason to be vexed, irritated, indignant. But don't magnify the evil."

"For myself," urged Fay, "I should not care, come whatever may come. But it will torture me beyond my measure of fortitude to know that you are writhing under the evil falsehoods that people—not malicious, heartless people, but our own old friends—will whisper about me."

"Let any man dare to speak an evil word of you in my hearing!" Felix exclaimed fiercely, as he drew himself to the full height of his slight frame.

The thought that idle tongues would presume to traduce his sister fired the blood of

the young clergyman, who was a soldier's son, and had a soldier's heart, though it had pleased heaven to make him something weaker in body than a not strong woman. For a few seconds he was so incensed, that his flashing eyes and dilated nostrils accorded ill with his religious vocation.

“If they do speak ill of me, even in your hearing,” Fay observed quietly and sadly, “you must endure it meekly. It will be a hard trial for you, dear. Oh! the courage of the priest is far finer than the courage of the soldier! The soldier has only to resent wrongs manfully; the priest must endure them uncomplainingly. The man of war performs his duty in resisting, the man of Christian service must often accomplish it by yielding to, his adversaries.”

The reproof—for it was a reproof, though it was uttered so tenderly and admiringly—was seasonable, and had the desired effect. Leaving him as quickly as it had taken possession of him, the young man's fury subsided, and passed away whilst his sister was still remind-

ing him of his duty to her and to heaven.

“True, Fay,” he assented, in a vein of purer and more exalted heroism. “I may not defend you with my arm, but, thank God, I may cover you with my heart. The man who stabs you shall cut through my heart first.”

With which assurance, Felix raised his sister from her seat, and closed an interview that had brought their hearts, that had never known a minute’s estrangement, into a closer and more perfect union, and bound them more firmly than ever with the bonds of generous sympathy for each other’s wrongs and unmerited troubles.

CHAPTER XVI.

GOSSIP AND COUNSEL.

EVERY day now brought some fresh annoyance, that increased Felix Avalon's concern for his sister, and confirmed him in the opinion that sympathy for Major Tilbury was not the only cause of the ill-feeling manifested to himself and Felicia by the commonalty of Quebec, and by persons of the best standing in the city. The seceders from his congregation grew in number. The subscribers to his schools began to send him notices of their intention to discontinue their subscriptions. Tradesmen who had known him from his boyhood, and had been in the habit of waiting for his salutations on seeing him come down their streets, now began to avoid his conversation, by returning into

their shops on observing him at a distance. If he followed them into their stores, they were cautious, taciturn, or absolutely discourteous. They were very busy, had accounts to inspect, had to write letters for the next post. If he wished to communicate anything of importance, they would prefer him to write his wishes, and not trouble himself to call upon them. From none of these obviously indignant householders and men of business could he get a satisfactory answer when he asked them if he had done anything to offend them. Two or three of them gave his inquiry the singular response, "Done anything to offend me, sir? I am not quite sure. Time will show."

Mr. Quex, of the Market Place, in the Upper Town, was more civil and considerate than most of his fellow-tradesmen, though, as it appeared in due course, he had especially strong reasons for regarding Felix and Felicia Avalon with disfavour. Quex was a man of sterling worth, generous in his emotions, and remarkable for fidelity to his associates. He was one of those exceptional characters whose gratitude

for kindness gains strength with time; and even when he was reasonably incensed against the clergyman and his sister, he could not forget that their father had been one of his staunchest and most considerate supporters in days when influential customers were greatly needed by the bookseller and newsvendor. It was Foxe Avalon who had made Quex's Library the lounging-place of the officers, and the resort of the principal civilians of the city. Mr. Quex was not the man to fail in loyalty to a dead patron when that patron's children needed the good word of a well-reputed tradesman.

Entering the shop of this worthy bookseller late one afternoon in the beginning of December, when the stores of the Market Place were bright with light, and a recent fall of snow had covered the open space with a fresh white carpet, Felix found Mr. Quex in his counting-house, reading the last volume of "The Mother Country."

On looking up from the book, and seeing his visitor, who had entered the office unannounced, Mr. Quex manifested signs of confusion, and

pushed the volume aside in a way which made it clear that he did not wish Felix Avalon to see it.

“ You are not ashamed to have me catch you reading one of your own novels ? ” Felix asked gaily.

“ One of *my* novels ? —well, you are right, Mr. Avalon, I bought it. But I am thankful to say, I did not write it. I would rather be the commonplace, dull fellow I am than have brains and use them to set people by the ears.”

“ Surely you find no harm in the book ? I don’t.”

“ You have read it, then ? ”

“ Of course. Every one is reading it.”

“ You have not had a copy from this library ? ”

“ Nor from any other lending library. A private copy was lent to me.”

“ It does not surprise me to hear that. Doubtless there are private copies in Quebec, for the book must have been written by some resident of Quebec.”

“ Is that the opinion of your customers ? ”

“ My own opinion—every one’s opinion, Mr. Avalon.”

“And is it your opinion that the author is a malevolent person?”

“No,” Mr. Quex said stoutly, in a tone that indicated his resolve not to think very badly of the anonymous author, whom the quidnuncs of the city were criticising sharply. “I don’t think that. What’s more, I won’t think it, if I can help it. I have been crying over the tale this afternoon like any boarding-school miss, and I’d lay any wager that the author’s heart is a feeling, tender, generous heart. Maud Henderson is a rare good woman, and she gave that Colonel Congreve no more than he deserved. The episode of poor little Fanny Hartlibb’s death is charming, pathetic, rare! But still the book is too severe on our colonial people, and many people of the colony resent its satire, sir, that they do. I know it, for I am in the way of hearing what they say about it; and I must say, though I like the tale very much as a whole, there are passages in it which Canadians have a right to be annoyed at.”

“The satire must then be understood.”

“The worst of satire, Mr. Avalon, is that it

is always liable to be misunderstood. What the satirist says about individuals is apt to be taken as directed against all the members of the class to which such individuals belong. And I don't wonder that the officers of the garrison are in a rage about the picture of Colonel Congreve."

"They dislike that character, eh?"

"Dislike it, sir!—they are furious, positively furious! They maintain that the Colonel's portrait is a libel on the whole military profession, written for the express purpose of bringing the army into contempt, and sowing in the colony disaffection against 'the mother country.'"

"That is most absurd and unjust. Why, the whole narrative overflows with devotion to England and love of the colony."

"It's unjust—I do think it unjust, sir. But it scarcely follows that it's absurd, or altogether without a show of reason. You see, the persons who are hurt and nettled by the book declare that the patriotic sentiment is all hypocritical flummery, used as a mask for the writer's mischievous purpose."

“Surely that can’t be the general opinion?”

“I should say, sir, that it’s the universal opinion. The talk about the book was very hot last night in the reading-room upstairs.”

“Do the talkers attribute the book to any person?” Felix inquired, not anticipating the embarrassment which the question occasioned his bookseller, who blushed, and coughed half a dozen insincere stage-coughs before he replied,

“Yes, they do, Mr. Avalon—that’s the fact. I wish they didn’t. But, of course, I am not going to repeat the gossip of the reading-room to the extent of mentioning names.”

“Of course not, Mr. Quex—don’t say more than you wish,” Felix promptly entreated, thankful that the librarian’s caution spared him the annoyance of hearing his sister’s name associated with a book that, through the perverse and extravagantly unfair constructions put upon its satire of colonial foibles, and its invectives against unworthy representatives of the mother country, was evidently giving rise to much acrimonious discussion, and to many bitter reflections on the author.

Having paid Mr. Quex the trifling account which he had entered the counting-house for the purpose of paying, Felix bade the librarian a cordial "good evening," and walked away briskly, through the clear, frosty air, to the Fairmead, where he arrived some twenty minutes after his customary dinner-hour. And as he wended his way homewards he pondered regretfully on what he had just learnt, or rather on what he inferred from what he had just learnt. Doubtless Major Tilbury, who necessarily knew the hidden and personal purpose of the novel, had induced his military friends to accept the construction which it was his interest to put on "The Mother Country." Probably he had avowed to them that he was pointed at by the character of Colonel Congreve, and had persuaded them that the portraiture was a gross, barbarous calumny. Sympathizing with their friend, the military men were, of course, be-stirring themselves to misrepresent the book, and stir up social resentment against the author, the veil of whose anonymity Major Tilbury either had taken, or would speedily take, good

care to destroy. The contents of the work had, of course, revealed its authorship to Felicia's enemy, and placed her to a certain extent in his power. The very performance by which Fay Avalon had hoped to complete the man's confusion, and drive him from Quebec, was the instrument by which he would endeavour to discredit her in social opinion, even to the point of rendering her hateful. These were the reasonable inferences which Felix drew from his conversation with Mr. Quex; and it is needless to relate that they caused the affectionate brother much discomfort, and some alarm. Moreover, by the light of Mr. Quex's revelations, Felix detected how "The Mother Country" might be used to sow disaffection in his congregation, and set its members against the clergyman whose sister was supposed to be at the same time disloyal to England and malicious towards Canadians.

The facts were irritating and acutely painful to the young man, who was a thorough Canadian, and loved Quebec no less passionately than his sister loved it. Had he been disposed to despondency, the annoying affair might have

plunged him into gloom. But his delicate constitution had been united with excellent spirits, and he was more disposed to smile at the triviality of the circumstances which occasioned his trouble than to apprehend any grievous consequences from a transient excitement. At the worst the novel could cause him nothing more than temporary vexation. In a year it would be forgotten, or be more charitably judged. It was highly improbable that the colonists would, for any great length of time, deem themselves badly treated in the book, or censure an author for giving poignant utterance to the universal colonial animosity against English black-sheep. And whilst he comforted himself with these and other like reflections, he was characteristically considerate of his sister, whom he resolved to keep as far as possible in ignorance of the painful misconceptions about her book.

Having heard Mr. Quex's critical opinion of "The Mother Country," and the librarian's account of the prevailing sentiments concerning the book, Felix soon heard what his bishop had to say on the same subject.

On the morning after his interview with the librarian, the master of the Fairmead received a friendly note from keen-eyed, swarthy, broad-shouldered Bishop Bignold. The bishop wished to have a little talk with the incumbent of St. Anne's, and would be happy to see him at luncheon on that same day. If Mr. Avalon's engagements would not permit him to come to luncheon at 1.30 P.M., the bishop would be happy to see him as soon after that time as he could conveniently manage to be at the episcopal residence. The bishop would not leave his house before four o'clock A.M. To which courteous summons Felix replied by special messenger to the effect that, though he could not join Dr. Bignold at luncheon, he would not fail to call upon him as soon as possible after two o'clock.

"I hear," said the popular bishop, going straight to business, when he had given Felix a cordial greeting, and conducted him to an easy-chair near the fire of the episcopal library, "that things are going unpleasantly with you in your district. Your congregation is leaving you."

“Your lordship has heard the truth,” Felix replied frankly; “and I was making up my mind to come to you about my difficulties, when I received your invitation. You doubtless know all that I can tell you. The people are leaving me; it is clear that they are offended with me; and yet I cannot remember to have done any thing likely to cause their displeasure.”

“You are sure of that?”

“Quite. Of course I have no reserves from you on such a subject.”

“I am sure you wouldn’t deny me the full confidence to which I have a right; and understand, my dear Avalon, I altogether exonerate you from blame in this matter, after what you have said.”

“It delights me to hear you say so.”

“Don’t imagine that I have sent for you to give you an episcopal wigging. I wish to assure you of my sympathy, and if possible to set you right with your people. May I, as your private friend, not as your ecclesiastical superior, touch on a delicate matter in your private affairs?”

“I beg you to say what you think right.”

“Of course you are aware that society isiping foolishly and rather spitefully about sister?”

“Society is of opinion, I understand,’ replied, as the blood leaped to his forehead, “that my sister should have accepted Tilbury, for whom she entertains a strong reasonable dislike. Since I approve of my sister’s conduct, surely society might forthwith condemn her for declining to marry such a person.”

“Some of the people, I am informed,” said the Bishop, with a smile on his benevolent countenance, “behaved very absurdly and pertinently at the Assembly Rooms, and what is due to a lady in their zeal for a man who seems to have won their sympathy on very unsatisfactory grounds. Major Tilbury’s feelings, I imagine, are not so sensitive that they require extraordinary consolations to support the disappointment which your sister has caused upon him. I do not venture to criticize her conduct, or to presume that she requires my approval; but I may tell you, my dear A-

that she is a lady for whom I entertain the liveliest admiration. But don't trouble yourself about that affair. In spite of our cloth, which in the eyes of some censors, is the garb of simpletons, we are men of this world as well as workers for the next; and men of the world do not need to be reminded that the world contains a very large proportion of extremely foolish people. Six months hence, the garrison will be ashamed of their adoption of the man's side in a quarrel about an offer of marriage; and the ladies of Quebec will come to the opinion that Miss Avalon, like any other woman, should be left to arrange matters with her suitors. The Tilbury affair will soon be upset or move off. But your sister's book is a more serious affair."

"My sister's book!"

"Yes. I seldom read novels, but I have perused 'The Mother Country,' and have enjoyed it heartily."

"But how do you know that my sister wrote it?"

"You are of course aware that it is universally attributed to her?"

“I did not know it as a fact, though I had grounds for fearing that she was regarded as the author. But rumour is no evidence that Felicia wrote the book.”

“True. But there can be no prudence in trying to keep the fact a secret when it is known to the world. It has transpired in London that the author of ‘The Mother Country’ is Miss Avalon of Quebec. The mail, that came in last night, brought me this copy of *The Globe*. Just run your eye over that paragraph.”

The paragraph to which the bishop thus called his guest’s attention, was this:—“The author of ‘Marjory Gatkin,’ and ‘The Mother Country,’ which have made their writer one of the most popular of female novelists, is Miss Felicia Avalon, of Quebec, a lady of Canadian birth and education. Persons familiar with society of the Canadian city speak strongly of the lady’s beauty and accomplishments. She has been the belle of all the Quebec belles for several seasons; she sings as effectively as she writes, and she paints in water-colours with great cleverness. She is the only daughter of the

late Colonel Foxe Avalon (one of the Gloucestershire Avalons), who was for something like half a century one of the principal inhabitants of Quebec ; and it is understood that the lady, who is unmarried, has considerable property."

"What an impertinent piece of gossip !" Felix exclaimed angrily.

"Very impertinent. Papers, I am informed, find that it pays to be impertinent."

"It will annoy my sister very much."

"Doubtless ; for if she is the author of the work, it is of course her wish to be anonymous ; on the other hand, if she has not written it, she of course will not like to be credited undeservedly with the composition of the work, that is most unjustly assailed by the natives and English settlers of Quebec."

"In either case it will grieve her."

"Now, my dear Avalon," continued the bishop, "of course I am not going to imitate the London journalist's impertinence, and busy myself with your sister's purely private affairs. And if you wish me to say no more on the matter, I will be silent about the book. But, if you per-

mit me to do so, I will, on the assumption that she is the author of the book, give you and her some advice—purely in the interest of our church.”

“Pray speak on, my lord.”

“No, no, don’t ‘my lord’ me. I don’t like that from so intimate a friend as yourself. Thank Heaven! I am not a member of that splendid and rather mischievous anachronism, the House of Lords; and I hold that a colonial bishop has no right to be my-lorded. Call me Bignold, or Dr. Bignold, or, if you wish to push me back on my official position, Bishop Bignold.”

“You are very kind. Assume for the moment that my sister is the author of ‘The Mother Country,’—bearing in mind, however, that I have no authority for proclaiming her its author—what then?”

“Then I should urge her, in her own interest, for your sake, and for the welfare of our church, to lose no time in avowing herself the writer of the book, and in doing her utmost to convince the world that you had no hand in its composition.”

“Whoever wrote the work, Dr. Bignold, I can assure you that I never saw a line of it until it was printed.”

“So much the better for you.”

“Not that there is a line in the whole three volumes that I should blush to avow. In my opinion it is an admirable work of fiction.”

“I agree with you. It is an excellent book, written for good ends, from right points of view, and in a most commendable spirit. But it contains many forcible passages of satire against the colonists, and of satire against the mother country, that are liable to be misunderstood. These passages are misrepresented, so as to set your congregation against you, who are suspected to have assisted your sister in writing them.”

“You surprise me.”

“If your sister did write the book, let her declare herself the sole and unaided author, and she will do much to dispel the misconceptions that are inspiring your flock with animosity against you.”

“Under no circumstances, will I put any con-

straint on my sister's judgment and sense of right."

"Under no circumstances, my dear Avalon, will there be any need to do so. Her judgment and sense of right will be sure to make her take the right course, as soon as the facts of the case are laid before her. There, I have given you my advice, on an assumption in support of which I have no better evidence than rumour and this copy of *The Globe*. Now, I must bid you good afternoon, for I have arrears of work to despatch."

Thus speaking, Bishop Bignold rose from the seat which he had occupied during the interview, and turning towards the window of his library, exclaimed, "What a superb day it is! I think the sharp, enlivening, invigorating cold of the Canadian winter infinitely preferable to the excessive heat of the Canadian summer. By-the-by, have you seen Mrs. Bignold's new sleigh, Sir Peter Carterel's present to us?"

Felix had not seen this new vehicle, though he had heard of it.

"You will be able to see it to-morrow at the

Fairmead, if the day should be as fine as this. Mrs. Bignold means to call on your sister in time to lunch with her, and proposes to ask her to take a drive with her. Tell Miss Avalon that I shall esteem it a favour if she will accept my wife's invitation, and add to the showiness of the new equipage by exhibiting her sables and seal-skin cloak in it."

"You are very considerate for us, and I thank you," replied Felix, who detected the kindly object that the Bishop and Mrs. Bignold had in view. The bishop was not the man to sit still when any of his clergy had need of his assistance; and Mrs. Bignold, a thoroughly kind-hearted woman of good Canadian family, had resolved to use all her influence "to bring the Quebec people to their senses about Miss Avalon, and her book, and that trumpery Major Tilbury."

The cordial kindness of the Bignolds, contrasting so strongly as it did against the slights and rebuffs which he had recently endured, touched Felix Avalon's heart. At the same time, the pride of that generous heart was

wounded by the thought that his incomparable sister should require anyone's protection against the unjust and cruel animosities of the people of Quebec, who had known her from her childhood.

On returning to the Fairmead, the young clergyman told his sister every particular of his interview with the Bishop ; and having revealed to her the destruction of her literary anonymity, he thought it best to relinquish his purpose of keeping disagreeable intelligence from her, and to tell her exactly what he had learnt from Mr. Quex about the feeling against "The Mother Country."

The drive, which Mrs. Bignold and Felicia took on the following afternoon, had all the immediate effect which the Bishop's wife desired it to have. All the world of Quebec was sleighing about the snow-mantled streets and environs of the town that afternoon, and at every turn the episcopal sleigh encountered persons who, after returning the greetings of the two ladies, carried about the intelligence that Mrs. Bignold meant to take Felicia's part against

her censors and persecutors. Amongst the persons whom the two friends met during their drive, were Major Tilbury, and his youthful admirers, Dandy Trevor and Mouse Ponsford, who were taking the air, qualified with tobacco-smoke, in a sleigh drawn by four horses. As the officers passed the ladies, salutes of ceremony were exchanged, but Major Tilbury was well aware that the ladies' smiles were directed altogether at his companions. "Umph!" thought Joe Tilbury, as he smoked his big cigar, whilst the four horses carried him onwards towards the race-course and the Plains of Abraham, "the Bishop means to fight for them because they are under the cloth, does he? I must give the Bishop a pill, to cure him of his folly."

The luxurious carriage exercise, and the frosty air, had an exhilarating effect on Fay Avalon; and she alighted from her drive at the Fairmead in such improved spirits that it cost Felix an effort to depress them by telling her that, during her absence, Dr. Renouf had called, and given a bad report of Great-Aunt Messurier's ailments.

The doctor's venerable patient was not going on satisfactorily. On the contrary, instead of recovering from her indisposition, she was exhibiting some dangerous symptoms. She was shaken, and had lost power. There were no grounds for apprehending that "the worst" was near at hand. But it was right that Felix and Fay should know that their aged relative would probably require a great deal of attention and careful nursing during the long, cold winter, that was still only at its commencement.

"Everything seems to go wrong," Felicia Avalon said sadly, her spirits suddenly falling to despondency, on the receipt of this distressing news. "From every side troubles flow in upon us."

"And we'll meet them, Fay, with smiling face and brave hearts."

"Brave hearts are sometimes broken more quickly than cowardly ones," Felicia answered, whilst a significant air of gloom came over her countenance, that a few minutes before had been radiant with animation. "God grant, my dear brother, that your brave heart may endure

all the trouble my folly is bringing upon it! If dear Aunt Messurier were to die this winter, I should never forgive myself."

"Nonsense, Fay. Don't speak so extravagantly and painfully about the illness of one who has already far exceeded the allotted span of human life. Remember her age."

"I should have remembered that," poor Fay replied, with touching woefulness, "when I first took the course that will result in her death. Oh! Felix, I am very wretched! I have been very naughty, but my punishment will exceed my wickedness."

CHAPTER XVII.

INTIMATIONS OF THE COMING STORM.

DR. RENOUF'S warning with respect to the critical state of Miss Measurer's health was not premature. The shock which the aged gentlewoman had sustained at Payne's Assembly Rooms resulted in an illness that was destined to be fatal. Hitherto a singularly vigorous person for one so slightly fashioned, the stately old lady suddenly exhibited all the ordinary indications of senile decay, and, within a week of her medical adviser's announcement that the present winter would in all probability be her last, she was visited with a stroke of paralysis that shattered her intellect, and reduced her to the bed of sickness, which she never quitted until she was borne from it to her final resting-

place in the family vault of the Messuriers in the Roman Catholic Cathedral.

During the few weeks which intervened between Miss Messurier's paralytic seizure and funeral, Felicia Avalon, leaving her brother to a bachelor's solitariness in the Fairmead, became an inmate of the antiquated little dwelling at the corner of St. Lewis and St. Ursule Streets, which had been her aunt's abode for half a century, at the commencement of which period its locality was deemed a highly fashionable quarter of Quebec. But though she was a resident in the house of her dying aunt, she had not the consolation of alleviating the patient's sufferings, which were obviously aggravated by additional unrest whenever Felicia ventured to attract her attention. Daily the Catholic priest, who had been the expiring lady's confessor for many years, appeared to pray by the bedside of the last Messurier of Quebec; but though Felicia's Protestantism would have allowed her to partake gladly in the spiritual ministrations provided for her aunt by the Church, of which her French ancestors had always been orthodox

adherents, her presence at the religious exercises occasioned the invalid such manifest disturbance that she was compelled to refrain from joining in the devotional services, from which the charitable and liberal priest had no wish to exclude her. The same privation was imposed upon her on other occasions when her natural place would have been by her aunt's side. Paralysis having taken from her the power of speech, poor old Miss Messurier could not put in words the morbid fancies and irritations which perplexed and tortured her darkened and enfeebled mind; but though she could no longer give verbal expression to her dislikes, it was painfully apparent, from the movements of her changed features, that the feeble and demented creature regarded her kinswoman with mingled terror and aversion.

Under these circumstances, Felicia Avalon desisted from entering the chamber of sickness, save at moments when fitful slumber rendered her aunt unconscious of her presence; and though, for social appearance's sake, she continued to live under her aunt's roof, she left her

altogether to the care of her priest, doctor, and personal servant. And words are impotent to convey an adequate idea of the mental anguish which Fay Avalon underwent from being thus detested by the imbecile creature who was all that remained to her of the aunt whose maternal care of her she would fain have repaid by leading her, with a daughter's tenderness and devotion, to the gate of eternity, through the terrors and dismal shadows of the valley of death. "The world abhors me," the miserable woman murmured to herself repeatedly during the mournful days of her imprisonment in the little house of quaintly-furnished, low-ceilinged rooms; "my blood recoils from me, and I scorn myself. But my punishment is less than I deserve. Rather than pray God to make it less, I would implore Him to make it heavier and sharper."

In one respect, however, Felicia Avalon had cause for thankfulness in the affliction which occasioned her extreme wretchedness. Had it not been for her aunt's illness, she would have been under the necessity of

inventing a pretext for withdrawing herself for a time from society, or would have been compelled to endure a series of galling slights and humiliations, similar in kind to the indignities put upon her by her acquaintance at the Assembly Rooms. Yet further, by causing her to reside in the heart of the Old Town, where she saw comparatively little of Felix, she was spared the mortification of knowing how cruelly he was affected by the proofs which he encountered daily of the rapidly-growing obloquy that covered his own and his sister's reputations.

For throughout the miserable weeks of Miss Messurier's illness, scarcely a day passed without adding to Felix Avalon's vexations and embarrassments. The seceders from his congregation grew in number; and whilst his flock fell away from him with significant quickness, he seldom took a walk by daylight without meeting an old acquaintance who was at obvious pains to give him the cold shoulder. Had he borne in his countenance the signs of small-pox in its most communicable stage, he would not have been more universally avoided

by the superior people of his native city; and whilst he was being snubbed, and cold-shouldered, or cut outright by the men and women of every Quebec clique, weeks went by before he could discover any cause for the extraordinary manifestations of social feeling, besides the misconstrued satire of his sister's novel.

A riotous demonstration against him in the Market Place of the Old Town failed to enlighten him, though it was marked by cries which gave him a clue to the most hurtful stories that were in circulation with respect to himself and his sister. As he was crossing the picturesque old place during the time of full market, several voices shouted behind him, "Who wrote the lying letters?" Some forty times this inquiry was roared out by as many sharp and angry voices, when the entire assemblage of sales-people and marketers combined with the poorer loiterers of the bazaar, to give a long series of groans and screams, declaratory of their ferocious abhorrence of the writer of the mendacious epistles. Another minute, and the young clergyman found himself the central object of

a tumultuous mob, whose inarticulate screaming and yelling were varied with such exclamations as "Go to London!" "Go to New York!" "Get over the Border!" "Linch the libeller, boys!" "Tar and feather him!" Whether the more turbulent members of the crowd would have proceeded to carry their threats into execution upon the clergyman, whose countenance and bearing exhibited no indications of alarm, is a question for conjecture; for scarcely had the proposals for a rude and summary execution of justice been caught up by a considerable number of the rioters, when a detachment of the Quebec police made a timely appearance on the scene of disturbance, and rescuing Felix from his clamorous assailants, carried him, unhurt, into Mr. Quex's shop, whence he escaped, after an hour's lapse, by the bookseller's postern-gate into St. Famille Street.

"In the name of mercy and good sense, I implore you to tell me what all this uproar means?" Felix ejaculated, as soon as he was closeted with the estranged and suspicious, but still not altogether unfriendly, librarian.

“Most of it is due to ‘The Mother Country.’ There’s no blinking facts that are common talk. Your sister’s book has raised a fire in the colony that won’t burn itself out quickly. The rage against her was bad enough before ; but since she avowed the authorship of the work in the city-papers the excitement has grown fiercer. Some will have it that she made the avowal in insolent defiance of public sentiment, and that she glories in the ill blood she has stirred.”

“Why, man,” Felix urged, at the top of his voice, “she avowed it at great sacrifice of her feelings, in order that the Church, of which I am a servant, might not suffer from the general suspicion that I was her literary coadjutor.”

“Unfortunately the avowal has not achieved its object,” Mr. Quex responded drily. “You must make up your mind to suffer a large share of the ill-feeling to which ‘The Mother Country’ has given rise.”

“For myself, I have no wish to escape the imputation. On the contrary, I would gladly bear all the unjust odium, if they would but spare her. But there must be some cause for the extraordi-

nary agitation against me besides my sister's book. What was the meaning of the cry 'Who wrote the lying letters?' Can you explain that?"

"I don't say that I couldn't, Mr. Avalon, but you must allow me to be silent on that point. You'll find out quite soon enough. Just now you have quite enough trouble on your mind, without seeking for more."

"Heaven knows that I have!" Felix assented mournfully.

It was in vain that he urged the bookseller to be communicative. Mr. Quex did not deny that he knew more than he cared to reveal. On the contrary, he expressly admitted that he was in possession of the information which his interrogator required, but he obstinately persisted in withholding it. Felix was therefore compelled to return to the Fairmead in a state of torturing ignorance and suspicion.

Though he allowed no day to pass during Miss Messurier's illness without calling twice at her house for an interview with his sister, Felix refrained from adding to Fay's affliction by telling her how badly affairs were going with him. In

the gloom and silence of her great-aunt's residence, Felicia heard nothing of the scandalous commotion which had taken place in the Market-Place, or of a later demonstration of the general disapproval of herself and brother.

The Sunday after the row in the Market-Place saw another and even more scandalous disturbance in St. Anne's Church. On entering that sacred building to perform morning service, Felix Avalon was surprised to find it densely crowded with a congregation, consisting almost entirely of humble persons, who had never been habitual attendants of the church. Here and there he discerned some of the respectable residents of his district, who had persevered in frequenting their ordinary place of worship, in spite of the rumours affecting its clergyman; but for the most part the assembly was made up of strangers who had gathered together for the purpose of getting up a church-brawl. The presence of several ill-conditioned fellows, who had been conspicuous in the riot of the Market-Place, caused Felix to apprehend that he would be mobbed in his own church.

The event justified the fear. Orderliness was maintained during the reading of prayers; but no sooner had the incumbent ascended the pulpit, and delivered the text for his sermon, than the uproar began. No acts of violence were perpetrated beyond the creation of a deafening noise, which was maintained in a manner that compelled the preacher to relinquish his purpose, and to quit the pulpit amidst the exulting jeers and triumphant clamour of his persecutors.

On the day after this painful and humiliating exhibition of disrespect for himself and his office, the Reverend Felix Avalon called on his bishop for counsel and instructions under circumstances equally injurious to the Church and the object of popular odium. But when he knocked at the prelate's door, Felix had no hope that the episcopal reception of him would be characterized by such cordiality as Bishop Bignold had displayed to him on former occasions. Several circumstances combined to assure the outraged clergyman that the same maleficent influences which had covered him with obloquy were successfully working estrangement between him and

his diocesan. Though Dr. Bignold, ever politically careful to render courtesies to his acquaintances of the Catholic faith, had called three times at Miss Messurier's door to make inquiries about her state, he had neither sent a message of sympathy to the Fairmead, nor uttered any expression of concern for the one inmate of the dying lady's household who would have especially valued such a mark of his affectionate consideration. Nor had Mrs. Bignold taken any notice whatever of Fay since the drive mentioned in a previous chapter. Felix, indeed, had twice met Mrs. Bignold driving through Quebec since his great-aunt's seizure ; but on both these occasions the bishop's wife, instead of stopping her sleigh for an exchange of friendly words, had merely responded to his salute with a distant and studiously formal bow, which signified to its recipient that the lady had entirely relinquished her generous purpose of playing the part of his and his sister's partisan.

“I presume,” said the bishop, opening the conversation with an air of formal coldness and

severity, when he had touched his visitor's hand in an eloquently frigid fashion, "that you have come to speak to me about the disturbance which occurred in your church yesterday?"

"Your lordship is right," responded Felix, inferring from Bishop Bignold's manner that their interview would be an affair of official duty instead of friendly intercourse. "I am not surprised to learn that the distressing occurrence is already known to you."

"All Quebec is talking about the matter. It is clear that you should withdraw from a position in which you do harm."

"What! Resign my office!" ejaculated Felix, flushing with reasonable anger, "and so admit that my persecutors are in right? Surely, you cannot require me to take any such course."

"I have no right to require it of you. At present I am not in a position to order you to resign your preferment, and I have no wish to treat you with injustice or harshness. You have a legal right to retain your office, and even to discharge its functions; but under existing

circumstances it is needless for me to say that you should do nothing to irritate those who are incensed against you."

"My obvious duty to myself and the Church, of which I am a zealous though sadly inefficient minister, requires that I should not declare the truthfulness of my unknown traducers, and endorse their slanders by resigning my preferment precipitately. But, short of resignation, I will take any course which your lordship may propose in the interest of the church."

"Good," the bishop interposed, catching quickly at the offer, as though he were fearful lest it should be withdrawn. "The Rev. John Malcolm—you know him—is at present in Quebec, and would take your duty for six months. He is now staying at Payne's Hotel, and you will find no difficulty in making an arrangement with him. Put your district in his hands for six months, and avoid your church until the end of this agitation shall be ascertained."

"I will do so."

"And if you could induce the magistrates to accept Mr. Malcolm as your 'locum

tenens' for six months at the gaol, I should advise you to take your sister away from Quebec for half-a-year. A trip through the States or to England would do both of you good. There, I have given you my best advice; and now, as I am very busy, you must leave me."

Rising from the seat which he had occupied during this extremely painful conversation, Felix observed with an air of pride and reproachfulness, "It ought not to be necessary for me to remind Bishop Bignold that my domestic affairs preclude me from leaving Quebec just at present."

"There is no need to remind me of that. You must, of course, remain here for some few days," the bishop responded, rising as he spoke, and for the first time allowing his voice to be slightly cordial, "but as soon as events set you at liberty, take a holiday—a long holiday. In confidence, strict confidence, I give you this advice; moreover, believe me, I give it less out of care for the Church than out of concern for yourself and Miss Avalon. You don't require

me to inform you that you have enemies in this place. But, perhaps, you have yet to learn that you are on the brink of disaster—hideous disaster."

"Be more explicit, sir, I entreat you."

"Not a word more," the bishop responded sharply—"not a word more. Perhaps I am wrong in giving you this warning. But I repeat it. *If* you know of any reason why it might be dangerous for you or any one dear to you to remain in Quebec for another three months, fly at once. Now, not another word will I say in betrayal of confidence put in me by those who know your danger."

"I am astounded, sir. What do you mean? What catastrophe has slander been preparing for me?"

"You are not the only ecclesiastic of our church who has occasion just now to complain of the prevalence of slander. Stay a minute, and you shall have an example of how calumny is attacking me."

As he spoke, Bishop Bignold pulled open a drawer of his library-table, and took from it a

note, which he unfolded and handed to his visitor, saying, in explanation of its contents, “ You will see that this abominable piece of paper is addressed to Colonel Rackham, the chairman of the Church Board of my cathedral church.”

The letter ran thus :—

“ DEAR COLONEL,

“ You will do well to be careful about your Church Board accounts, some of which our excellent bishop manipulates according to his pleasure. Don’t take the prelate’s statements without scrutinizing them. As a boy he was a clerk in the office of a notorious London bank, and ever since he has been a marvellously clever accountant, never omitting to credit himself with all that is his due, and sometimes forgetting what he owes to others. Perhaps you are not aware that at Kingfield, Essex, England, he had years since some singular disputes with his parishioners about money-matters. Subsequently, when his too trustful admirers at St. John’s, Brompton, London—the

living which he held till he came out here to preside over the diocese of Quebec—allowed him to control the expenditure of their Church Building Fund, he played his old tricks with comical audacity and considerable success. Enough—I have warned you.

“Yours truly,

“A SUSPICIOUS AUDITOR.”

Whilst Felix read this defamatory and anonymous communication, his countenance was scrutinized intently by the bishop, who detected in it nothing but signs of indignation and disgust at the infamous libel.

“What an atrocious composition!” Felix ejaculated.

“There is some truth in it,” the bishop observed.

“What?”

“I was in my boyhood a bank-clerk of a mismanaged bank; I was rector of Kingfield, and there had a dispute with two or three disaffected parishioners, whom I detected in abusing the income of a parochial trust. I was also rector

of St. John's, Brompton, when I discovered some confusion and dishonest misrepresentations in the accounts of the Church Building Fund. The libeller is aware of these unpleasant disputes, and he uses them to blacken my character here."

"Who can the villainous calumniator be?"

"Ah! who? Have you ever seen that handwriting before?"

"No—I do not recognize it."

"Indeed—that is strange."

"Why strange, Bishop Bignold? Surely you do not suppose that I am likely to be in the libeller's confidence?"

"It is strange that you have never seen the handwriting before," Dr. Bignold answered with peculiar deliberateness; "because anonymous libels in that handwriting have been sent about Quebec very liberally during the last few weeks. There is scarcely a man of considerable importance in this city who has not received one of the industrious libeller's communications, some of which asperse the fame of virtuous gentle-women, whilst others of them prefer charges of

rascality against merchants and public functionaries of unimpeachable character. It is strange that the defamatory scribe should never have thought of writing to you; it is still more curious that no one of your numerous acquaintances, whom the writer has addressed, should have ere now submitted to you a specimen of the calumnies so profusely dispersed."

"Good heavens!" exclaimed Felix, first becoming suddenly pale with alarm, and then as suddenly crimsoning with indignation, "this is one of the 'lying letters' about which the mob raised a cry in the Market Place the other day."

"It is, unquestionably,"

"But the people of Quebec can't be so insane as to imagine that I am the author of such atrocious fabrications!"

"I do not think that the general suspicion points to you as the fabricator."

"But they can't be so absolutely mad as to think that I am in any way in league with the defamer?—that I could know him and not denounce his guilt? Who is it that rumour accuses of this prodigious iniquity?"

Whereupon Bishop Bignold drew himself up in his stateliest manner, and dismissed his visitor by saying, “It is not my office to report the suspicions—I sincerely trust, the groundless suspicions—of those who have suffered from the calumniator’s machinations. And now, sir, this interview must cease ; for I have much business to transact.”

Before Felix Avalon had recovered nerve to push his inquiries, and insist that Dr. Bignold should treat him with an absence of insulting reserve, if not with the candour of friendship, he stood in the open space before the Bishop’s house, dizzy and dismayed.

But the facts drove him to one terrible, ghastly conclusion. After three minutes of deliberation he had arrived at that conclusion without Bishop Bignold’s assistance.

These libels, scattered about Quebec, had roused the people to mob him in the Market Place, to hoot him in his church. He was not thought to have concocted them himself—the Bishop had acknowledged that. But the recent behaviour of his congregation and fellow-towns-

men indicated that, in their belief, the defamatory papers had issued from some one in his confidence, from a person for whose conduct he might in some sense be held responsible. The agitation caused by these libels—no one of which he had ever seen until the bishop showed him a specimen of the lying letters—was a continuation of the agitation against him, which was the immediate consequence of the publication of “The Mother Country.” It must be; and Felix shivered with rage as he accepted the result of his meditations—it must be that Fay, his sister, his generous, truthful, too courageous sister, was believed to be the perpetrator of a series of dastardly lies against the peace of honest families and the fair fame of her dearest friends. The bare thought of such a barbarous misconception of his darling’s character was loathsome, maddening, insupportable.

On leaving his house that morning, Felix Avalon had intended to see his sister immediately after his interview with Bishop Bignold; but the terrifying and revolting discovery of the lengths to which Fay’s unscrupulous adversary

was going for the satisfaction of his vindictive sentiments caused him to relinquish his purpose. Turning his face northwards, he walked in the direction of his home ; and, as he slowly retraced his steps to the Fairmead, he devised measures to clear his sister's fame of the imputation which had been so audaciously and diabolically placed upon it. For as soon as he realized some part of the danger in which Felicia stood, and ascertained the chief cause of the odium in which she and he were held by their old friends, he was neither ignorant of the enemy who had occasioned their trouble, nor slow to perceive that he must lose no time in vindicating her goodness and his own honour.

On crossing the threshold of his house, wearied by his long walk, and the cruel agitations of the morning, he was met by our old friend Martha, who made him a communication that caused him more of satisfaction than regret, though it was the announcement of a domestic loss.

During his absence a messenger had arrived at the Fairmead with intelligence of Miss Mesurier's death.

“Thank heaven!” Felix murmured, when he had passed through the hall of his villa, and found himself alone in his darkened study. “There is no cause to weep for the event which closes the poor creature’s earthly sufferings, liberates Fay from depressing imprisonment, and sets me free to appeal to public justice and generosity against our traducers.”

For Felix had already decided on the course which he would take. During the days which would elapse before his great-aunt’s funeral, he would learn as much as possible respecting the nature and number of the circulated libels, of which he had that morning seen a specimen; and having obtained more exact evidence of the prevailing belief that they had emanated from his sister’s pen and with his connivance, he would direct his lawyers to bestir themselves to discover the libeller, and would at the same time appeal in the public journals for that social sympathy and protection to which the outrages perpetrated against him gave him a title. Knowing, as he did, who the defamer was, the slandered clergyman had no doubt that discreetly in-

structed legal agents would experience no great difficulty in acquiring legal proof of the culprit's iniquity. Nor could he doubt that as soon as the veritable wrong-doer was detected and exposed, social opinion would undergo a sudden revulsion in his sister's favour, and make her full amends for the injustice of which it had been guilty. It was passing strange that circumstances should have hitherto so far co-operated with the culprit's bold and crafty operations as to enable him to achieve so much for the shame and anguish of the objects of his malignity. But it was absolutely incredible that the villain's success could be otherwise than transient.

It was thus that, after the subsidence of his first emotions of dismay and disgust at the imperfectly ascertained enormities of his sister's enemy, Felix found consolation in the belief that so impudent and maniacal a foe could be speedily vanquished.

It would perhaps have been better for himself and his sister had he commenced, without an hour's delay, the arduous task of undoing

their adversary's mischievous work. Shrinking, however, from a course which would occasion a perilous increase to the strain already put on Fay's powers of endurance, and unwilling to perform an act which might appear to imply selfish indifference to his great-aunt's death, he decided to withhold the discoveries of that morning from his sister until Miss Messurier had been interred.

END OF THE FIRST VOLUME.

111



